

# Election '97

THIS PAPER'S MANIFESTO:  
HARD FACTS AND STRAIGHT QUESTIONS,  
WITH NO PARTY AGENDA AND  
NO STRING-PULLING MOGULS.

## Major: 'I think we can win'

PM gets  
on his  
soapbox  
for May  
election

Anthony Bevins  
Political Editor

John Major yesterday opened the 1-May election campaign with an appeal to the voters to accept that if it was time for a change, then "we are the change". That plea was later reinforced by a warning that the election was not a game.

But Tony Blair said: "The Tories keep saying to people that this is the best Britain can be. What I say to people is that Britain can be better than this." His party's appeal will undoubtedly be broadened by the latest in a long line of Labour converts - the *Sun*, which claimed after the last election it was the *Sun* "not won it" for Mr Major in 1992, and in today's edition comes out for Mr Blair.

For the Liberal Democrats, Paddy Ashdown welcomed the chance for the voters to say what they thought of the Government's "broken promises, incompetence and divisions".

The start of the six-week election campaign was a long last triggered by the Prime Minister with an impromptu Cabinet, a visit to the Palace, and a return to Downing Street, where he announced to television cameras the election timetable.

Parliament will sit for the rest of this week, clearing an agreed programme of residual legislation before rising on Friday. It will not meet again before being formally dissolved, by proclamation, on 8 April.

Before going out on to the hustings, taking his soapbox from the last election on a flying visit to Luton - a town with two highly marginal Tory seats - Mr Major said that the Government had, since 1979, given the country "a revolution in choice".

He told reporters in Down-



Making a speech: John Major kicks off his election campaign on a flying visit to Luton, which has two marginal Tory seats

ing Street, that in spite of the "brutes" and "difficulties" he was proud of his party's 18-year record, before turning to address his biggest weak-spot - the argument that it is time for a change.

"If people are looking for change," Mr Major said, "we are the change, and we'll carry forward what we've been doing for the last 18 years."

Later, in a written statement, he added: "A general election is not some faraway spectator sport or a TV talk-show. It will affect life behind every front door in the land." What was at stake, he warned, were issues "that touch the cold hard realities of 56 million daily lives."

Mr Blair told *Sky News* the voters would remember Tory promises of, 1992, "when Mr

Major promised tax cuts, and then raised taxes; his promise not to extend VAT to fuel, before doing so; and his promise to bring crime under control, with violent crime still rising.

Labour would make a difference on schools, the health service, crime, and jobs. "We aren't just going to have the rewards going to an elite few at the top," he said.

In a London speech last night, Mr Ashdown said: "The last election is remembered for the War of Jennifer's Ear. I want this campaign to be remembered for the Plans for Jennifer's Education... I am determined that, every day of this campaign, we focus on how to make Britain the world's number one learning society in the next century."

Explaining why he did not think that he should have to face both Mr Blair and Mr Ashdown, the Conservative leader said:

"After the election, either Mr Blair or I will be Prime Minister. I have some sympathy for Mr Ashdown's position. I am sure the broadcasters might find some way to involve him, but I think the principal debate will be between the leader of the Labour Party and myself."

A senior Labour source said last night that it was "silly" of broadcasters to respond to that by trying to find ways around the law, trying to accommodate Mr Major's terms of engagement.

He said in Downing Street:

"I very much wish to meet Mr Blair in debate." But he then delivered a series of qualifications that left Labour, the Liberal Democrats and other minority parties significantly disatisfied.

The source also said the public should not be shut out of the debate; a selected audience should be given the opportunity to put their questions to the party leaders.

And as for the Tory preference for one anchor-man to

chair the debate, Labour said they would prefer a number of prominent media "heavyweights" to be given the chance of grilling the leaders, and putting them and their policies under the microscope.

In Downing Street, Mr Major said: "I believe this election is winnable. Not only do I think it's winnable, but I think that we are going to win this election."

"I remember being asked that on the doorstep of Downing Street in 1992 and I am still here in 1997 and I expect to be here after the election."

But even as Mr Major was speaking, Mr Blair was visiting a South London school before embarking on a visit to Gloucester - a Tory marginal Labour needs to win if it is to get a working Commons majority.

## A historic choice that faces us all

Cynicism is cheap. It's important to remember, through the next sound-bitten, media-manipulated six weeks, that this election offers Britain a serious, potentially historic, choice. The result will imprint itself on our lives for years to come. It will affect our individual wealth and opportunities; how we are governed; how we feel about the country.

Yet many millions of us don't

agree and have lost interest, never mind faith, in British democracy. In the final years of a turbulent century, which saw the arrival of the full franchise, and the declared victory of democracy across most of the world, a worrying number of Britons have become bored by the whole business. Some 9.6m adults didn't bother to vote in 1992. This time, many voters have concluded that the country has already made up its mind and won't bother to inquire further.

Yet if the pollsters are vindicated and Tony Blair's New Labour wins on 1 May, then our political system will alter, probably quite fast and probably forever. From Scotland to London, from Cardiff to Strasbourg, from town halls to the House of Lords, we will see the biggest programme of change to the governance of Britain since before the First World War.

Many of these changes will be preceded by referendums. If Mr Blair relies on the Liberal Democrats in government, they will come faster and more strongly than ever. Some excitable souls think they will mean a radical change in the whole party system, giving us a new politics for the millennium. But whatever view you take, it is hardly unimportant.

What, meanwhile, if John Major confounds received opinion, as he has before and, teetering on his soapbox, wins a fifth Conservative term in the teeth of all expectation? That too would mean a changed political landscape and their thirst to be on the winning side. But this paper has full freedom to speak and no such pressure. This is a great privilege, particularly at election time. We will use it seriously and with relish.

Andrew Marr

## 'I'll not vote for any of them - it won't change a thing'

Clare Garner

Young people are basically being disenfranchised. We're persuading Pascal Smart, and a probable three million like him to vote on 1 May will be one of the biggest challenges facing John Major and Tony Blair during the campaign.

The 24-year-old aspiring musician from Croydon will be following the election campaign closely, but only from a position of "amused superiority". He has no intention of voting.

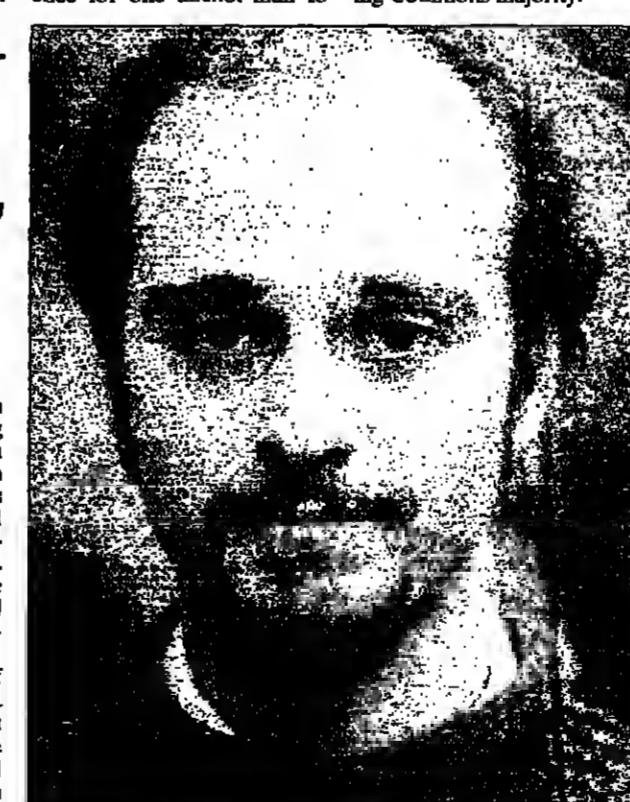
Nothing short of the closure of all nuclear power stations would make Mr Smart change his mind. "I just don't think any of the main parties handle any of the things that are important - especially for young people in this country," Mr Smart said en route to his evening job as a 210-a-week barman. "I'd put the environment higher on the agenda, the decriminalisation of cannabis and the general treatment of youth."

There is, he said, a problem with the status quo. "Young people are under the impression that this establishment has been the same for hundreds of years and nothing will ever change. I myself think the only way anything will change is revolution. The existing trend towards large environmental problems will probably cause that. If it doesn't, it'll go out quietly."

He has no respect for any of today's politicians. "They don't have any more foresight than wondering what is going to be the most popular policies and appealing to the lowest common denominator," he said.

He would, however, be happy to vote for better policies "if anyone came up with any," regardless of the cost to his own pocket.

He liked the idea of participating in a pre-election television debate. "Oh yes," he said, his eyes lighting up. "I'd ask them questions about the environment, human rights and



Photograph: Philip Meech

about how to take the system down, back to its foundations, and back again in a more successful manner.

But to Mr Smart's mind, there is no point in him voting. Labour, he said, is going to win anyway. "I don't think it would change anything. I don't think

it would make any difference - except that Croydon is a marginal constituency."

He is not really fussed about the result. "I'll hopefully be leaving the country and buying a remote island in the South Pacific as soon as possible, so I won't mind either way."

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## news

## SIGHTS &amp; SHIRTS

## Warrington bomber granted referral to Court of Appeal

A 51-year-old man serving 16 years for his alleged part in the IRA bombing of Warrington gas works has had his case referred to the Court of Appeal.

John Kinsella, who has always protested his innocence was told yesterday that Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, had been given new evidence that could cast doubt on his conviction.

He was sentenced in 1994 for his part in the destruction of the gas works. No one was killed in the huge fire ball that followed the blast, but a policeman was shot - and survived - during the IRA cell's subsequent getaway.

Kinsella, whose wife, Audrey, and two children live in Nottingham, was convicted of handling explosives with intent to endanger life, but he always insisted he was duped. He buried a bag containing Semtex and firearms but has always maintained he believed it contained only stolen silver.

His solicitor Mike McColgan said: "It's brilliant news. John will be delighted."

Steve Boggan

## Cathedral wins £2m lottery grant

Canterbury Cathedral received the biggest grant in a National Lottery Heritage Fund payout today, a £2.5m award for a new education centre.

It is the first major development within the ancient cathedral grounds and church authorities claim it will boost the two million people who already visit the city each year.

The grant matches cash raised by cathedral authorities to begin the first phase of a £7.5m development in the precincts of the historic site aimed at children and young people.

Designed by architect Sir William Whitfield, the complex includes a 250-seat auditorium, two state-of-the-art audio visual theatres and conference and exhibition facilities.

## Police chief's bugging challenge



The former Merseyside Assistant Chief Constable Alison Halford was in court yesterday to hear the last round in her legal battle which could force changes in Britain's phone-tapping laws. Miss Halford, once the highest-ranking female police officer in the country, claims her phones at work and at home were illegally bugged to try to discredit her - because she complained of sex discrimination in the force.

Miss Halford's lawyers asked the Human Rights judges to rule that the phone taps were a breach of her right to privacy and freedom of expression, safeguarded by the Human Rights Convention, to which Britain is a signatory.

A final judgment is expected later this year.

## RUC inquiry into pub shoot-out

An investigation has been launched into claims that security forces in Northern Ireland riddled a pub with bullets during a bungled surveillance operation.

Three men dressed in combat gear and balaclavas allegedly fired on bar staff at the Derrybird Inn, near Lurgan, Co Armagh, on Friday night. Police say they opened fire while investigating suspicious activity.

The Independent Commission for Police Complaints was yesterday brought in to investigate the incident, an RUC spokesman confirmed.

Bar owner Patsy Mulholland said the men, later identified by the RUC as members of the security forces, chased his staff across the car park and burst into the crowded bar, threatening to shoot.

## Swampy defies runway tunnel ban

The A30 bypass protestor "Swampy" returned to the site of the proposed second runway at Manchester airport last night in apparent defiance of haul conditions set yesterday.

Swampy, whose real name is Daniel Hooper, was arrested by Wimslow police on Sunday night after joining a protest against the building of a £170m runway. It is understood that part of the fence near the protesters' camp was damaged.

A spokesman for the coalition against Runway 2 said Hooper, 23, from Hazelwood in Buckinghamshire, had gone inside one of the tunnels the activists had dug to prevent work on the runway. "He has gone back because he feels that his haul conditions are unfair and he is quite prepared to be re-arrested."

Hooper is due to appear before Macclesfield magistrates on 18 April.

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## people



Tired of attention: Barbara and Boris Becker are looking for the quiet life in Florida

## Embittered Becker buys a one-way ticket to America

Far from maddening German crowds, hyperactive *Fatman* and racial prejudice, Boris Becker fled to Florida yesterday with a one-way ticket, vowing never to return for anything other than tennis. His *Heimat* will henceforth be a millionaires' hideaway near Miami, where he hopes his coloured son, Noah, will not attract attention, and the family will have the privacy they could only dream about in Bavaria.

The 29-year-old tennis star made his decision to emigrate after a raid by tax inspectors, which the Beckers claimed was akin to burglary, on his Munich house earlier this year. "Until then my house was my castle," he said. "They took away my home."

After the case of Steffi Graf's missing taxes, the authorities declared open season on all German stars suspected of siphoning away their foreign earnings in overseas heavens. Becker denies any wrong-doing, and says he is not prepared to go through the agony of dealing with German tax-hounds for the rest of his life.

The tennis player has also become increasingly exasperated with the attention his family was receiving

from stalkers, autograph-hunters and the plainly insatiable. The last of a fading galaxy of German stars still resident in the country, he felt he was getting more than his fair share of fame. The adoration was overwhelming, but often it took a sinister form. Threatening letters, some motivated by racial attitudes towards his black wife, Barbara, forced him to hire an army of bodyguards for his family.

Becker was particularly worried about Noah, now aged three, who he feared would have trouble blending into an all-white German environment. "My son will now grow up as a normal child - without bodyguards," he said. "In Germany that isn't possible."

Noah can certainly look forward to a multi-cultural environment, although one with limited social diversity. Home will henceforth be Fisher Island, a tiny strip of land inhabited by 400 millionaires and their servants. Anonymity is guaranteed. With neighbours like Sophia Loren, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Luciano Pavarotti, he can count on being left alone.

Imre Karacs, Bonn

## Accent on Noddy in transatlantic adventure

Herd on the heels of reports that *Winnie the Pooh* is to get a Glasgow accent in a new version of the children's books, comes news that *Noddy* and The Famous Five are to be turned into Americans.

Trocadero, the entertainment group that bought the rights to Enid Blyton's fictional characters last year for £15m, has unveiled plans to send the little boy with the bell on his hat to the US for the first time. Big ears goes with him, but there is no chance of the *Gollivogs* making the trip.

Over 40 episodes of *Noddy*, made for the BBC in the early Nineties, are to be re-scripted for an American audience and overdubbed with an American actor's voice.

"Inevitably some of the emphasis and language will change," said David Lane, managing director of the Enid Blyton company. "We would be arrogant to think he doesn't need translating into American-English."

Trocadero and BBC Worldwide, which holds the broadcast rights to the *Noddy* stories, have signed a deal with America's Public



Broadcasting Service, to broadcast the new show from next year. It will be the first foray into the US for any Blyton characters, although the books have sold hundreds of millions of copies in the rest of the world.

The *Gollivogs*, who have attracted accusations of racism because of their unsavoury characters, never appeared in the Nineties versions of the series and so there is no need to be written out for the American market.

As well as *Noddy*, Trocadero is rewriting the Famous Five books for Americans. "I doubt that they will continue to say 'golly gosh,'" said Mr Lane. "It's more likely to be 'gee whizz'." Paul McCann

## Sax player begins Marchioness' fight

A brilliant musician on the brink of major success suffered a nervous breakdown and turned to alcohol after surviving the *Marchioness* disaster, the High Court heard yesterday. Josephine Wells, 37, wept as she described how the accident in which 51 people died ended her burgeoning career as a saxophonist, which included work with leading pop bands like Tears for Fears and The Communards.

Ms Wells, of Salford, Greater Manchester, had beaten 10,000 other young musicians to win a scholarship to the Royal College of Music, London, with her then instrument, the clarinet. But she left her studies to launch the pop career which would have earned her an estimated £40,000 a year if it had continued, the court heard.

She is claiming damages from the owners of the *Marchioness* and the gravel barge which hit it, the *Bow Belle*. They have accepted liability in civil law.

Musicians, including former teachers from the Royal College of Music, and Pete Townshend of The Who - with whom she once recorded - are supporting Ms Wells. Mr Townshend is expected to give evidence today.

Louise Jury

## briefing

## LAW

## New corruption offence aimed at public servants

Bribe-taking public employees and councillors could be among those ensnared by a proposed law designed to combat corruption. The new offence, set out in a consultation paper from the Law Commission, would cover corrupt transactions involving a range of individuals who could be described as agents for, or owing a duty to, other individuals.

An example could be a public servant, responsible for awarding council contracts, who accepted a bribe in return for favouring a particular contractor. A local councillor who arranged for an applicant to be granted planning permission in return for a bribe would also be caught by the new offence. Judges and police officers would also be subject to the law.

## TRAINING

## Jobless build their own future

A pioneering training scheme has succeeded in getting two thirds of long-term unemployed into work while saving local people thousands on their fuel bills, according to a report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Pilot schemes run by the Wise Group, in Scotland, Derby and the London borough of Newham provide those who have been out of work for at least a year with paid work experience in installing insulation, energy-efficient heating and home security systems.

Two-thirds of the trainees taken on each year went on to find work after leaving the scheme, of which the majority were permanent. Six out of 10 gained NVQ qualifications while taking part. For all but the first eight weeks, trainees are paid wages of £116 a week, taking them out of the benefit system.

The cost of each job created is an estimated £14,100 - but this falls to £8,300 when tax payments and benefit savings are taken into account.

*Bridging the Jobs Gap: £9.95 plus £1.50 p&p, York Publishing Services, 64 Halford Road, York YO3 7XQ*

## SOCIETY

## Champagne days return to UK

The British have rediscovered their taste for champagne, according to figures published yesterday. More than 20 million bottles of bubbly were imported last year, a volume not seen since the 1980s.

The 18.4 per cent increase on 1995, compared to a worldwide rise in imports of 2.6 per cent, re-established the UK as the number one champagne buyer in the world, knocking Germany off the top spot, according to the Champagne Information Bureau.

Drinkers are also said to be spending more on each bottle, buying Prestige Cuvée and Vintage champagnes.

Worldwide shipments total 256 million bottles.



## SCHOOLS

## Boys losing out in sex education

Schools need to take boys' sex education more seriously, the Sex Education Forum said yesterday. The traditional male way of learning about sex during giggles behind the bike sheds can be dangerous because boys may be scared to show their ignorance, according to the forum's research.

Discussion in groups also limits opportunities for talking about feelings. Boys experience a high level of peer pressure to lose their virginity early and "many young men learn about sex through pornography".

The forum says schools should consider teaching boys separately for at least some sex education lessons and should consult them about what they want to know. They should also try to ensure that male teachers are involved in some teaching.

*Supporting Sex and Relationships Education for Boys and Young Men: Sex Education Forum, National Children's Bureau, 8 Wakeley St, London EC1V 7QE. Send SAE.*

Judith Judd

## HEALTH

## Screening key to cancer success

Screening for bowel disease could lead to earlier diagnosis and treatment of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), in particular Crohn's Disease and ulcerative colitis, says a report being presented to the British Society of Gastroenterology today.

Despite improved treatment, at least 300 people die a year in England and Wales from these conditions. In a study, carried out at the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine, doctors discovered that out of 971 people who died of IBD during 1993-1995, 44 per cent had Crohn's Disease and 56 per cent had ulcerative colitis.

Almost one in five of those who died were under 50. Yet screening for these conditions is simple and cheap. The British Society of Gastroenterology recommends early intervention by family doctors. Its guidelines say: "GPs should not delay testing for blood in faecal samples to diagnose IBD and cancers as early as possible, particularly in patients with a family history of digestive disorders."

*Inflammatory Bowel Disease: Guidelines in Gastroenterology, free from the British Society of Gastroenterology, 3 St Andrews Place, London NW1 4LB.*

Annabel Ferriman

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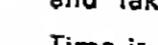
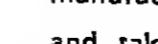
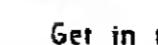
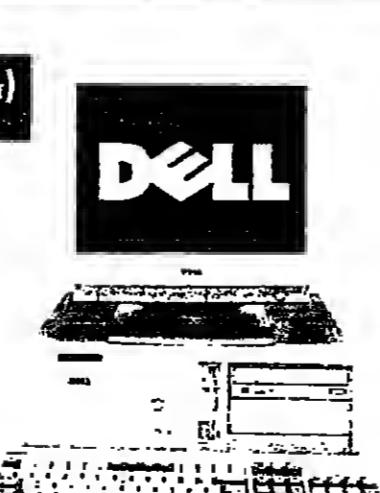
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# South-east house prices 'at boiling point'

Ian Burrell

Generous bonuses paid to workers in the City are contributing to a north-south gulf in the housing market with property prices in the South-east said to be at "boiling point". A survey of the housing market carried out by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors found buyers in the South-east were responding "with abandon" to shortages in supply.

As a consequence, 82 per cent of chartered surveyors in the South-east reported that house prices had increased over the three months to the end of February.

The demand for property in the South-east has brought down the average time for a house sale to 11 weeks, compared to 13 weeks nationally.

Estate agents say they have too few properties to offer, with the average number of

dwellings per agent down to 42, a 10-per-cent fall on this time last year. One agent in Ashford, Surrey, said the property shortage was the worst he had known in 30 years. Chartered surveyors in the North reported far less activity. Only a quarter said prices had increased in the three-month period.

Ian Perry, RICS housing spokesman, said the upward trend of prices in the South-east would spread north but was held

up by the caution being exercised by northern buyers. "Parts of the Midlands and North are not seeing the same demand or activity but eventually the current resurgence will become more uniform," he said. County houses and three-bedroom houses are in great demand in all parts of the country but flats and bungalows are still the most difficult properties to sell.

RICS said the re-emergence

of large houses in the City, on a scale not seen since the 1980s, was inflating prices in the South-east. Tony Copping Joyce, a central London estate agent, said: "The economy from my point of view is a fizzing and buzzing City, and it is generating an awful lot of cash."

There are a lot of people who, during five years of stagnation, have been waiting to go out and buy. There is great pressure on property."

Prices in fashionable London districts, such as Islington and Camden, and in sought-after suburbs, such as Twickenham and Totteridge, are rising faster than in poorer areas, like Walthamstow and Leytonstone.

Copping Joyce, the RICS southern areas housing spokesman, said the north-south divide extended as far as Birmingham but did not include the South-west, where prices are not rising.

Some northern estate agents said the picture was more complicated than the one painted by the RICS. They said the divide was between London and the provinces rather than the North and the South.

Others agreed that northern buyers were being far more parsimonious than their southern counterparts.

Helen Snell-Webb, of Lewisham Barclay estate agents, near York, said: "Cer-

tainly we have not had any price rises and people are striking hard bargains."

"People are much more prepared to walk away rather than get into a 'best-and-final-offer' situation with other buyers. They are saying 'We are not going to be pushed up.'

She added: "People in the North lost less money in the 1988 boom. They have no reason to be any more cautious than the southerners."

## Accused of child abuse. But was his baby a victim of brittle bone disease?

Annabel Ferriman

Martin Smith was convinced that if you were innocent of child abuse, you had nothing to worry about. That was until last June, when his illusions were shattered. His two-month-old baby suffered a broken leg and he and his wife were charged with grievous bodily harm.

Mr Smith (not his real name) now believes that his baby was a victim of "temporary brittle bone disease", a condition which is causing controversy in the medical world.

Mr Smith's son, Tom, now 11 months old, was born seven weeks premature. At only eight weeks old, his mother noticed he was in pain and took him to the GP, who suggested an X-ray. That revealed he had a broken leg, and further tests showed several broken ribs and a collar bone, injuries that doctors estimated had occurred about four weeks earlier.

Since then, Tom's parents have maintained their innocence and waged a ceaseless campaign to get their child back.

They have several factors on their side. They have been allowed to keep their other two children at home; the police have dropped the criminal charges and the baby has been allowed to stay with his aunt, rather than going into care. But it is still under a child protection order.

Now they have found an expert, who has another explanation. Dr Colin Paterson, a senior lecturer in medicine at Dundee University, who has examined the baby claims that he is suffering from a condition, which he has dubbed "temporary brittle bone disease". He believes that this is a variant of the well-recognised bone disease, osteogenesis imperfecta (OI), which is an inherited disorder of the connective tissue.

Dr Paterson, who has studied brittle bone disease for more than 20 years, recently published a study of 39 children whom he thought suffered from this temporary form of the disease. They had all suffered fractures in the first year of life, the fractures were found by accident when an X-ray was taken, and, in many cases, the children had no signs of bruising.

It is a very distinctive syndrome, the symptoms of which mimic the symptoms of non-accidental injury. It has often been misdiagnosed as child abuse. It is more common among twins and premature babies," he said.

Dr Paterson, who has ap-



Shattered illusions: The family caught up in the brittle bones controversy

Photograph: Andrew Hossack

peared in court cases and has been responsible for re-uniting a number of children with their parents, wants to see the syndrome (which he thinks may be caused by an enzyme deficiency) recognised by paediatricians and radiologists.

The problem is that Dr Paterson is one of the few doctors in the UK who thinks that the condition exists. The vast majority of paediatricians do not believe that there is a temporary version of brittle bone disease.

A conference, being held in Edinburgh on Friday by the Royal College of Radiologists, will address the issue of how to diagnose non-accidental injury. There is only one type that is occasionally difficult to distinguish from non-accidental injury - that is known as Type 4A. But this is exceptionally rare. "One paediatrician has calculated that in his city of Sheffield, doctors can expect to see a case about once every 100-300 years," Dr Hall said.

She says there are four types of OI - three of which are easy to diagnose. The first, which is relatively mild, is characterised by the child having blue sclera (whites of the eyes), the second is invariably fatal and the third is identifiable by the child's badly deformed bones.

There is only one type that is

hypothetical condition [temporary brittle bone disease] bears a striking similarity to many cases of non-accidental injury. I would suggest that they are the same condition but with different labels depending on the credibility of the child

caretaker's explanation. "I know of one case, where Dr Paterson's theory was accepted, the baby was taken off the 'at risk' register and returned home, and subsequently died," she added.

Dr Paterson, however, re-

mained convinced. The problem for the accused parents is that they do not know where to turn. Tom's grandfather said: "There should really be a self-help group to turn to. We do not understand the system and feel completely alone."

## Shortlisted writers get orange light for big prize

David Lister  
Arts News Editor

Some of the top female novelists are to have extracts of their work put on the Internet, it was announced at the London International Book Fair yesterday, as publishers bowed to the new(ish) technology.

The organisers of the £20,000 Orange Fiction Prize for the best novel written by a woman announced they would be the first literary award to establish a Net presence. Extracts from all the shortlisted books will be put on the Net and people around the world will be invited to review them with a prize of a holiday for two for the best review.

Prize organiser Kate Mosse said: "A lot of people say they find book reviews in the papers luvvish and they feel left out of it. We want to know what real people think of the books, what a 16-year-old in India thinks of some of the works by writers of Indian origin on the list."

The long list of 20 books announced at the book fair yesterday includes expected choices such as Margaret Atwood, her novel *Alex's Grace*, Beryl Bainbridge, who missed out on both the Booker and Whitbread, with *Every Man For Himself* and Jeanette Winterson with *Guilty Pleasures*.

The list also includes unknowns from small publishers, such as Leonie Ross with *All The Blood Is Red*, published by Angela Royal Publishing.

The judges, who will note the reviews from around the world, but will make the final decision themselves, brought in eight of the 20 books themselves, as publishers had not thought them likely to win and had not entered them for the prize.



Beryl Bainbridge: Contender for the Orange prize

The judging panel will be chaired by the writer and broadcaster Lisa Jardine.

Defending the women-only nature of the prize, Ms Mosse said it had brought a number of female authors to the notice of the public. One of last year's shortlist, Pagan Kennedy, had only had 400 copies of her novel *Spinster* printed at first. After the prize, it sold 8,000. Sales of last year's winner, Helen Dunmore, were tiny. She has quadrupled them following the publicity of the prize and it is now selling in America for the first time.

The prize is set to earn more esteem with the further announcement yesterday of the Orange Prize for fiction edu-

cation project, funded with £30,000 from the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts. This will send resource materials into 3,500 schools to encourage 11-14 year-olds to read more widely. The prize is open to women of any age, living anywhere in the world, writing in English. Ms Mosse says the concept of a women-only prize is now accepted and people feel embarrassed to criticise it. However, the Booker Prize winner AS Byatt has spoken out against it, saying female writers should not be "ghettoised".

The women novelists put on the Net will be jostling for cyberspace with many other writers of fiction and non-fiction, to

judge by the obsession with new media at the book fair yesterday. Talks for publishers and booksellers included "Selling Books On The Internet" and "Trends in The Multimedia Market." Mark Ride, head of a consultancy providing specialist assistance for publishers on the impact of new technology, said: "A growing number of publishers are testing the Internet as a marketing tool, and finding something which may at first appear to be counter-intuitive, posting part or all of the text of books on the Web appears universally to increase sales of the printed product."

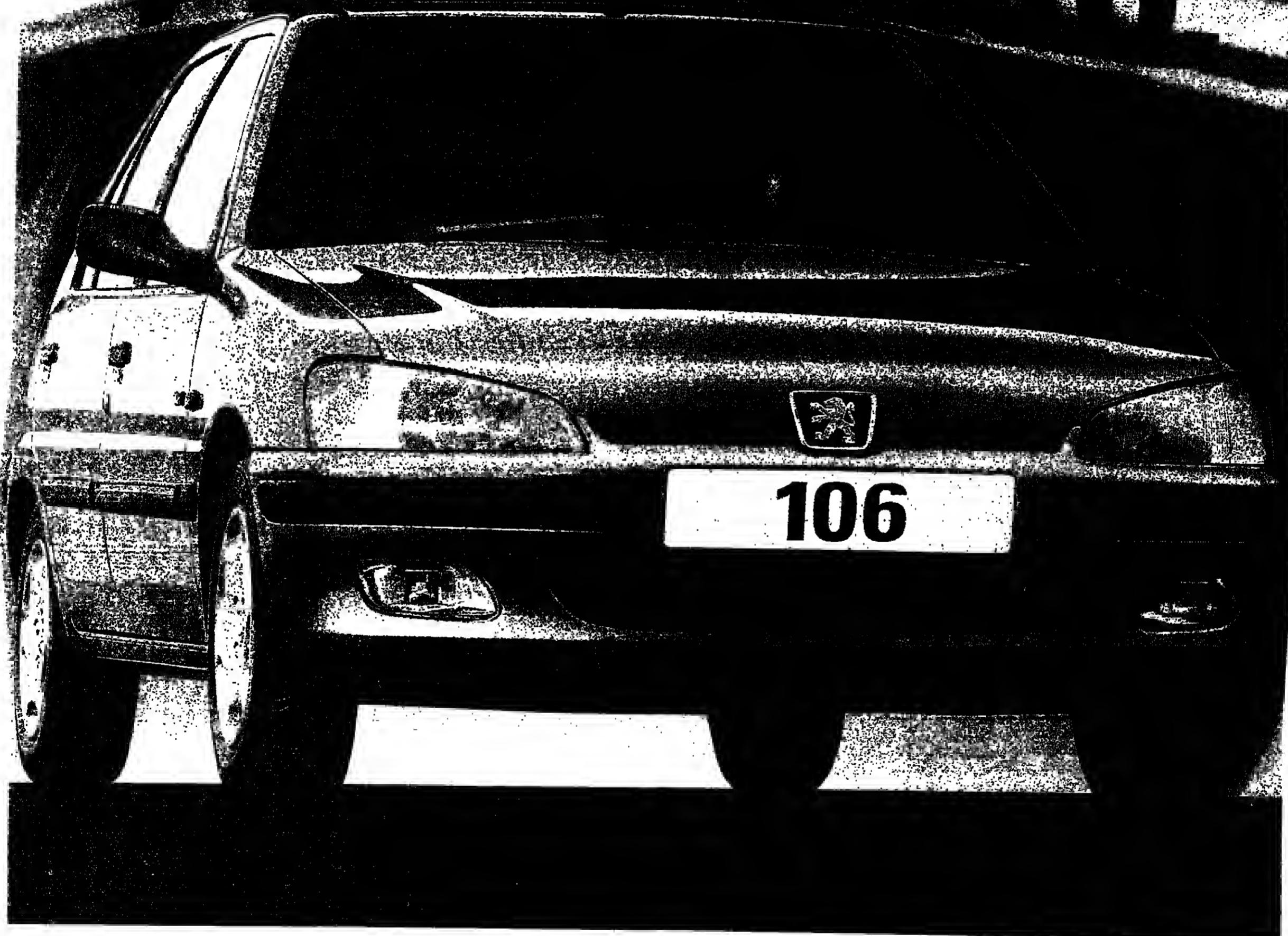
A growing proportion of middle managers in publishing companies are regular users of the Internet. However, almost all report that the Chief Executive never uses the Net, has probably only seen the Web in presentations and really has no idea what the fuss is about. If the future of publishing is on networks, this is analogous to never going into a bookshop. But the book fair is also maintaining its traditional role as a meeting place for literary agents, negotiating deals with publishers.

A large area on the top floor at Olympia was designed the International Rights Centre - 250 tables set aside for agents and publisher wheelers-dealers.

On the main floor, the 550 exhibitors displayed technologies new and old. At one stand, Ian Botham signed copies of a new book, *Sporting Memories*, which was printed for customers immediately by Rank Xerox using digital technology. At another stand, a soon-to-be-published book called *Sophie's Kiss* was being touted - the first biography of Sophie Rhys Jones, the girlfriend of Prince Edward.

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10.834, 10.835, 10.836, 10.837, 10

## ELECTION COUNTDOWN

# Labour leader goes straight to the target

Fran Abrams  
Political Correspondent

Labour's election bandwagon made its first stop yesterday in the party's most crucial campaign target - the Gloucester seat which the party must win if Tony Blair is to become prime minister. The seat is 46th on Labour's target list and it must be won if the party is to have an overall Commons majority.

The party's immediate response to yesterday's announcement was low-key, and Mr Blair spent the morning visiting a primary school in Southwark, south London, before leaving for a question and answer session with floating voters.

With Labour's main aim being to avoid damaging its 20-point poll lead over the coming weeks, the sight of Mr Blair dabbled in a sandpit must have been one to warm the hearts of the spin doctors. That over, he headed for the station en route for Gloucester where, accompanied by his wife Cherie, he met 20 voters in the Jarvis Hotel and Country Club.

The portents, however, were not good. The hotel boasts a Sebastian Coe health club, named after the Tory MP for Falmouth and Camborne, and next door's dry-ski slope prompted: "All downhill from here then," quips from the assembled press.

His audience, chosen through telephone polling, was receptive and plain, though two of them admitted to being party members. Mr Blair told them he planned several more such shirtsleeved encounters over the coming weeks.

"One of the things we want to do is go out and talk to people. Not presidential-style, giz and glitz but really talking to people. We don't have all the answers by any means but we think we offer a better future for the country," he said. "Who did you say he was?" came the reply.

He told them that the campaign would be the longest since 1918, but added that he was relishing the prospect. "For me it already feels as if we have been having a campaign for months and months and months. What I feel is the Government haven't really been governing this country for quite a long time," he said.

But Mr Blair added that the campaign could be a dirty one. "The next election will be a battle between hope and fear. People will be saying Labour is going to do this to you and do that to you. We have got to settle and reassure people."

The Labour Party would govern the country as it has run its own affairs in the past few years, he said, adding: "We are running for office as New Labour and we are going to govern as New Labour. There is no going back."

Most of Mr Blair's audience appeared impressed. One or two said they had already been out canvassing for the party. Graham Pepperell, who had not yet made up his mind but was "leaning towards Labour", said he would be more likely now to vote for Tess Kingham, the party's Gloucester candidate.

"Mr Blair came across as quite sincere, but he's like a lot of politicians, they are quick to renege. But he's a young man and if he wants to establish a long career in politics he will try to deliver the goods," he said.

Mr Blair's train journey had been somewhat less elevating, though. Commuters on the 3.18pm sprinter from Swindon had been met with large on their faces as the Blair entourage boarded. A Paddington one woman passenger had nudged her neighbour: "Look there's Tony Blair. He's the next Prime Minister."

"Who did you say he was?" came the reply.



Ready for the challenge: Tony Blair standing outside his home in Islington, north London, yesterday after learning that the Prime Minister had finally announced the date of the general election

# Major's soap box gets its first outing in campaign

Colin Brown  
Chief Political Correspondent

John Major returned to the soap box yesterday to launch his general election fight-back in a near high-street riot.

The Prime Minister's visit to Luton - the scene of his soap box revival in the 1992 campaign - showed that he has lost none of the street-fighting spirit.

Surrounded by a phalanx of policemen, Mr Major said he was taking his message over the heads of the commentators to the people to win five more years. But surrounded by a hostile crowd largely made up of chanting students from the Luton University, he was heckled with shouts of "you'll be on the dole, John".

An empty drinks can was thrown at the scrum with the Prime Minister in the centre, careered along the high street crushing all in front of it.

The soap box was waiting for him in St George's Square, five years almost to the week after it helped to rescue a lack-lustre campaign. The street-fighting boy from Brixton appeared to be delighted with the prospect of mixing slogans with the protesters. Tory spin doctors were also pleased they made the perfect backdrop for the tea time news.

Pointing to a haggard bunch of students with a pink banner demanding higher grants, Mr Major said: "There they are - the left wing of the Labour Party shouting their mindless slogans."

The small box, made of plywood and held together with black tape, standing one foot high, is Mr Major's last hope of victory and will be in evidence across Britain for the next six weeks.

It is like a mascot. It's a symbol of his style of campaigning - the man amongst the people. That is the way he wants it," said a Tory aide.

After a hitch with a microphone Mr Major told his audience: "He was the only one to Luton yesterday not to show any doubts but it may be enough to carry him through the next six weeks."

ence: "The last time I came to Luton, we had a reception like this - three weeks later we won both Luton seats and the general election."

But after ten minutes of the Prime Minister's rhetoric, explaining the virtues of the British economy, some of the crowd filtered away complaining: "I wish he'd stop wittering."

As a first outing, it showed that the Prime Minister does not intend to give up without a fight, even though it failed to impress young first-time voters such as Andrew Wilkes, 19, a student who described the spectacle as "a waste of time".

Tory Central Office promised he would "hit the ground running" but some shoppers thought they were witnessing a robbery. "I saw the helicopter and thought I would come and have a look. The last time I saw a helicopter someone had broken into my neighbour's," said one bemused shopper.

The evidence on the street suggests there are more "don't knows" than the polls reveal. Barbara Adjei, 20, a public administration student, said: "I am still undecided. I am waiting for that TV debate. That is going to make a big difference." Clair Shearar, 22, said: "A lot of students were out today and they are all Labour but I hope he gets back rather than Labour."

Two housewives, Kim Upton and Hazel Dickman, are voting Labour. "Not because I feel so strongly for Labour but because I feel so against the Tories. I don't like John Major as a leader. He is not strong enough. And it's time for a change," said Ms Upton.

Before retreating to the safety of his official Daimler, Mr Major told the crowd: "I have not a shred of doubt that the Conservatives will have five more years."

He was the only one to Luton yesterday not to show any doubts but it may be enough to carry him through the next six weeks.

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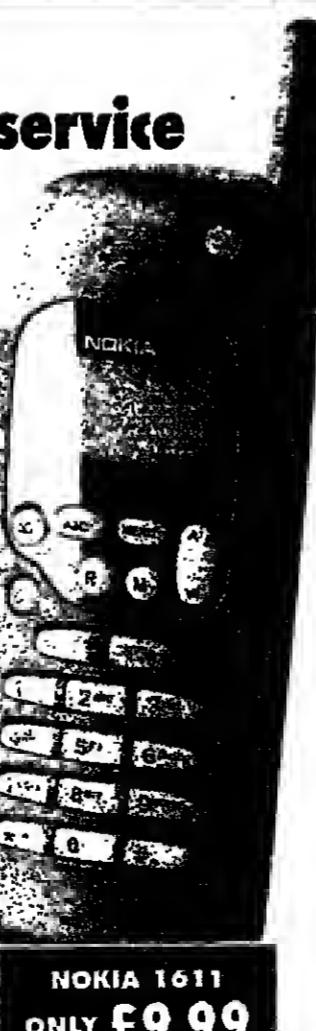
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## ELECTION COUNTDOWN

We are all standing in the dark of Downing Street. At one end we can see the sunshine illuminating the statues along Whitehall; at the other it warms the suited backs of civil servants strolling amongst the weeping willows and cherry blossoms. We alone are in deep shade.

Britain's political corps is there. The photographers dressed for survival in the wild, poised precariously on their aluminium ladders; the camera crews and sound engineers, with their tripods, and rainbow-coloured spaghetti of trailing cables; the mobile phones relaying the latest rumour back to newsdesks throughout London.

Already up and broadcasting in far corners of Downing St are several serious young women speaking continuously to regional news

programmes and Andorran radio. And there's a jolly chap with a proper body from the waist up, but below whose belt-line dangles a horrid mass of tangled wires, connecting him umbilically with a camera and sound system.

This is Adam Boulton, the substantial political editor from Sky Television, much of whose life is spent broadcasting live in front of the camera. One wonders whether Boulton himself forgets whether he's on air or not. Does he occasionally answer routine domestic queries about the shopping or lunch with a judicious pause and a balanced judgement? Or will he one day take a televised leak ("we're just waiting for a strong flow. And here it is, and everybody here feels very relieved")?

DAVID Aaronovitch

## They also serve who only stand and wait

There's movement and Cabinet members arrive, filing in through the black door, all looking about half their real size. Each one is asked the same two questions: "Are you going to win?" And then (after the obligatory thumbs up or

nod): "Why?" Why? What are they supposed to answer? How about: "Because you cannot fool all of the people all of the time, but under first past the post you only need 42 per cent"? We wait. Then the Cabinet all come

out again, and the PM is into his car and off, lickety-split to kiss hands at the palace and ask for a dissolution. The ITN helicopter flies overhead, marking the Prime Minister's passage to the palace, and ruining other journalists' attempts to contact their offices.

The Prime Minister's Press Secretary, Jonathan Haslam, walks amongst us, and a gaggle collects around him with the rapidity and determination of a Moscow crowd told that someone is selling cossacks. A line of waisty pundits – led by ITN's pear-shaped political editor, Michael Brunson – is mounting away to their various midday audiences. In the middle stands the beautiful blonde gamine from BBC World Service, like a miniature Snow White amongst the Gigantic Dwarves. And whoops, Jonathan Haslam has begun an

off-the-record briefing with Adam Boulton – who is still live on camera.

The PM sweeps back into Number Ten, a microphone is set up in the middle of the street, and a cute gaggle of Tarquins and Helene – bussed in from Central Office to stand down one end looking decorative – take up position like bridesmaids at an important but tedious wedding.

Finally Mr Major, looking exactly like himself, emerges and announces that there'll be an election on 1 May, answers some hard questions like "Will you win the general election?" and "Why?", then goes back inside to get ready for his trip up to Luton.

The Tarquins and the journalists drift off. It has been one of those historic events that the people who witnessed it will probably never, ever remember.

## Lib-Dems no bar to TV poll debate

Rob Brown  
Media Editor

The biggest obstacle to a live televised debate between John Major and Tony Blair – the threat of a lawsuit from the Liberal Democrats – looks certain to be overcome.

It appears there are at least two ways round what the Labour leader terms "the problem of Paddy". The option most acceptable to the Lib Dems would be to have their leader debate with his Labour and Con-

**6 I can't believe there's not a way round the Paddy problem**

servative counterparts before they go head-to-head against each other. But, if a agreement cannot be reached on a series of three debates, it is not entirely inconceivable that the BBC will steam ahead and simply stage a Major-Blair duel.

Mr Major endeavoured to display his belief in fairness yesterday when announcing the date of the election on the steps of Downing Street, he stated: "I have some sympathy for Mr Ashdown's position. I am sure the broadcasters may find some way to involve him."

The Prime Minister swiftly added that he thought the principal clash should be between him and Mr Blair, that "a responsible, long debate dealing in detail ... will enhance the democratic process, not damage it."

The Labour leader said he was prepared to go head-to-head with his Liberal Democrat counterpart if this were

required to get a separate crack at Mr Major. "I can't believe there's not a way round the Paddy problem," he said. Later, the Labour deputy leader, John Prescott, said his party had been calling for the televised debate for some time and they "didn't mind at all" if the Liberal Democrats were included.

But he told BBC Radio 4's *World at One* programme that it was important that there was audience participation.

Mr Ashdown said he would welcome the opportunity of taking part in a televised debate. "It is absolutely vital people get to hear the different options on offer," he said. More colourfully, the Lib Dem's campaign chairman, Lord Holme, said that granting Mr Ashdown only a "walk on part" would be like an edition of *Blind Date* in which two of the participants got to talk to the girl and the third only got to talk to Cilla Black.

The Liberal Democrats have been threatening to mount a legal challenge against the broadcasters if they don't stage a three-way debate or series of debates involving their leader. They would have a strong case against ITV, which has a statutory duty to be impartial under the terms of the Broadcasting Act of 1990.

But the BBC is not shackled to the same extent. It is governed only by a series of agreements in its charter which are open to challenge and are not set down in law.

Geoffrey Robertson QC, an expert on media law, said yesterday that the BBC had to decide if it would be in the public interest to hold a Major-Blair debate, and how it would ensure fairness. In his opinion, this might be achieved by letting the other party leaders comment, perhaps 30 minutes afterwards.



Higher vision: Baroness Thatcher holding a press conference – three hours after the Prime Minister's – outside her offices in Belgravia yesterday, in which she warned against Labour coming, backed John Major and exhorted the voters to 'stick with us'

Photograph: Kalpesh Lathigra

## Fighting talk from Thatcher's doorstep

Christian Wolmar  
Westminster Correspondent

Baroness Thatcher took just three hours to follow John Major's example and hold her own doorstep press conference in an effort to quash any suggestion that she might do an Enoch Powell and recommend voting Labour.

Standing on the steps in front of her office in Belgravia, central London, she clearly wanted to distance herself from her recently reported remarks that Tony Blair would not let Britain down. She stressed that new Labour

was little different from old Labour, saying "the phrase 'new Labour' is cunningly designed to conceal a lot of old socialism. Don't be taken in".

Looking rather distressed, perhaps by the 12-starred European flag flying in the German embassy opposite, she responded to questions about her reported remarks on Mr Blair by saying: "I do not expect to see Prime Minister Blair."

Then, confusingly, she added: "Mr Blair is different from Prime Minister Blair" but she noticeably did not deny having made the original sup-

portive remarks of the Labour leader.

When, as she was walking back inside, it was suggested to her by *The Independent* that Tony Blair was "a good chap", she stopped, turned round and, eyes ablaze with all the old fire and finger pointing, she said: "I hope you think Thatcher's a good woman, otherwise why have you come in such numbers?"

She had clearly been briefed by Conservative Central Office, because earlier she had given out the line which was yesterday's launch theme for the campaign: "I hear people saying 'Time

for a change'. That's absurd. If you have got a good builder or, dare I say it, a good grocer or a good government, you don't change. You stick with them, and I hope you'll stick with us."

She was clearly trying to be helpful to John Major in saying "I am fighting for Prime Minister Major and I am fighting with every effort I can bring forth."

But again, her remarks became rather Delphic when she added that voters should "Stay with us until we cross the finishing line."

Where or when was this finishing

line? On 1 May or long into the next millennium? And did it mean that afterwards, people no longer had to stick with the Tories? She was not in a mood for explanation and felt that the three minutes she had given was plenty.

Perhaps she is holding back for a string of appearances. Lady Thatcher's doorstep performance may be the first of many during the next six weeks. She boasted that she had received 51 invitations to speak and that more were coming in all the time. But she did not say whether she had accepted any.

## Politicians argue but voters have made up their minds

The lengthy election campaign may influence only a small minority of voters, with many people already decided on which party to support, according to *The Independent's* selected group of disaffected Conservative voters.

Yesterday as the Iron Lady's successor John Major finally announced the election date, most of the group claimed to have made up their minds; and crucially for New Labour's hopes a number are switching their support to Tony Blair.

Lionel Baird, 52, a paramedic, described himself as an

**Michael Streeter** revisits *The Independent's* panel of Redditch constituents who voted Tory in the Eighties but who must switch to Blair if Labour is to win

said: "I have discussed this with my wife and we both came to a similar conclusion."

"This government is looking a bit long in the tooth and John Major has not come up to expectations as a leader."

Adrian Blick, 30, a self-employed bricklayer, has made up his mind to support new Labour, claiming the Conservatives are no longer trustworthy. The key issues for him are the

state of the National Health Service and the education system.

He believes Labour may do better than the Conservatives on the economy.

"I would not mind paying a bit extra tax as long as the NHS and schools were better," he said. "I'll definitely be voting Labour."

Another switcher is Roger

many in the group by believing the campaign will have little impact.

"I think most people will not change their minds now. I'm 99.9 per cent sure I will vote Labour this time – it's simply time we had a change."

He will listen to the arguments, he says, without expecting to be persuaded, and believes the likely United States-style television debate will

stage to influence people.

Mr Frost says contrary to Tory hopes people do not believe the economy is benefiting them. "When I talk to people I know, they say the economy is not that different from before as far as I am concerned."

Those in the group likely to

stay with the Conservatives

mer sales consultant, says she will "almost definitely" vote Conservative again as she does not trust Labour, though she is looking forward to hearing the arguments and the television debate.

"I'm not sure if it will influence me, but it will be quite funny. I think John Major will do well and that may influence anyone sitting on the fence to vote Conservative. At the moment most people do want change."

David Bignal, 51, is a "disgruntled Conservative, but says in the end he will vote Tory again, citing the economy.

"The economy is doing well, inflation is low and unemployment is coming down. I just do not trust the other side enough."

"When it comes to the crunch and I have to make the decision, I think my heart will still be with the Conservatives."

The views are echoed by Brian Nicholls, a butcher, who said: "The economy is stable – at the moment I'm concerned about what might happen to inflation under Labour."

*The Independent* will be returning to the group during the election campaign to see if and how its members' views change.



Our election pledge: you won't miss a thing

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"This is Adam Boulton bringing you the election announcement live and it's Mayday, Mayday..."

## ELECTION COUNTDOWN



Coming out: Some of the big names from the world of business, sport, entertainment and religion who have joined the growing list of well-known personalities pledging their support for John Major or Tony Blair. Photomontage: Jonathan Anstee

## Movers and shakers line up to support main parties

Adrian Hadland

Business leaders, big names in sport and entertainment, and then there was Baroness Thatcher. The list of those coming out for Tony Blair seems endless.

Even if Lady Thatcher yesterday rowed back on her apparent support for the Labour leader, the Blair endorsement list remains impressive. By contrast, John Major's support among movers and shakers looks ... well, shaky.

Whether this reluctance openly to support the Conservative Party is due to the intimidating 20-point plus poll advantage, the prospect of a

resounding electoral defeat, or the trend noticed by pollsters in the 1992 election – a tendency by Tory voters to conceal their allegiance – is open to question.

Among the few personalities who have come out for the Tories have been Earl Attlee, grandson of the former Labour prime minister, Clement Attlee, who crossed the floor in protest at Labour's plan to abolish the hereditary peerage.

The chief executive of Nissan, Ian Gibson, showed his preference when he argued that Labour's support for the Social Chapter could damage the competitiveness of British companies. Geri, of the Spice Girls, has also

indicated her backing for Mr Major, in spite of the ideological rift this could precipitate within the hugely successful Spice Girls. Mel C has said that she will vote Labour.

Other than Lady Fairbairn, who has promised to move permanently to Mexico if Mr Blair moves into Downing Street, and various international contributors, few other personalities have signalled their support for the Tories.

Mr Blair on the other hand, has received the nod from a significantly larger and arguably more influential list of backers.

In the business sector, Granada Group chairman, Gerry Robinson, Reed Employment Agency founder, Alec Reed, Sun Life chairman, Lord

Douro, and WH Smith chairman, Jeremy Hardie, were among sporting personalities who have indicated they will be voting Conservative on 1 May.

Other Tory supporters at the function included Baroness (PD) James, Lorraine Chase, Sir Cliff Richard, Barbara Windsor, Carol Vorderman and Fiona Fullerton.

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stand up in public as Labour people. They include two religious leaders, the Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, and the next Bishop of Worcester, Peter Selby, the disc jockey Sir Terence Conran, "If you are rich and selfish you vote Tory," Brian Moore, the former rugby union star, said earlier this year.

Coming out for Major: Earl Attlee, grandson of the former Labour PM, Clement Attlee; Ian Gibson, chief executive, Nissan; Frank Bruno, former boxer; Lord Lloyd-Webber, composer; Baroness (PD) James, the writer; Spice Girl, Geri;

David Seaman, goalkeeper; Michael Atherton, cricketer; Barbara Windsor, actress; Robert Powell, actor; Carol Vorderman, presenter.

Backing Blair: Gerry Robinson, Granada Group chairman; Jeremy Hardie, chairman of WH Smith; Dr Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi; Mci C. of the Spice Girls; Sir Terence Conran, restaurateur; Lord Atttenborough, film director; Michael Cashman, actor; Richard Wilson, actor; Alan Shearer, football player; Stephen Fry, actor and writer.

## Howard and Straw agree deal

## to push through Bills on crime

Anthony Bevins and Jason Benett

A wide range of crime legislation, including measures for tougher sentencing, and action against stalkers and sex offenders, is expected to be passed before the general election after a deal was agreed between Labour and the Home Office yesterday.

The Home Secretary's flagship Crime Bill, which appeared to be doomed after a House of Lords amendment blocked it, now looks likely to be passed.

Labour has agreed to "fast track" 17 Bills on law and order providing a Commons vote on the Crime (Sentences) Bill amendment is allowed later this week. The amendment will give judges greater discretion in sentencing in "exceptional circumstances".

The compromise was agreed after a meeting between Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, and Jack Straw.

the shadow Home Secretary. However, senior Labour sources said last night that government proposals for an extension of grant-maintained schools, and an increase of school selection of pupils would be an early victim of the long election campaign.

Both proposals, included in the Education Bill, would have to be jettisoned if the remainder of the legislation was to be given high-speed approval, and agreed enactment, by the time

the House of Commons rises at the end of this week.

Following the Prime Minister's Downing Street announcement that the Commons would meet for the last time next Friday, the parliamentary "usual channels" – the behind-the-scenes business managers who include the Leader of the House, Tony Newton, and his Labour counterpart, Ann Taylor, and representatives of the whips' offices – embarked on intensive negotiations on the Bill which would continue, it was pro-

posed that the rest of the week's business must be "adjusted".

The big tussle between the parties last night was over the fate of the Crime (Sentences) Bill, although the Home Office has a dozen others caught up in the rush to the statute book.

Labour feared that Mr Howard was preparing to use its opposition to key sections of the legislation to attack its alleged weakness on law and order. Mr Straw offered help to get the legislation through four weeks

ago, promising an "open door" if Mr Howard agreed amendments clarifying the wording of the Bill, but he said the offer had been "petulantly" rejected.

There are also a number of backbench Private Member's Bills, covering the sale of drugs in clubs and alcohol and young people, but the Knives Bill, introducing new curbs on the sale and advertising of combat knives, cleared Parliament under its own steam last night.

The Lords gave the backbench legislation, which has cross-party support, a third reading without a vote and it now awaits Royal Assent.

Strewn through the Commons by Labour's James Wray, MP for Provan, and through the Lords by the former Metropolitan Police commander Baroness Hilton of Egardon, the legislation was initially opposed as "unworkable" by Mr Howard, but was eventually accepted under the weight of public pressure for action.

19 March: February unemployment figures announced.

20 March: February inflation figures.

Prime Minister's last question time of this Parliament.

21 March: Parliament prorogues, effectively rising for the Easter break. MPs will be paid through to formal dissolution of Parliament more than two weeks later.

31 March: Easter Monday.

Manifestos expected to be published this week.

8 April: Parliament dissolved: proclamation and issue of writs for the election – starting the election clock.

14 April: Noon deadline for normal absent-voting.

applications. Candidate nominations open.

16 April: March unemployment figures and government borrowing figures. Last day for candidate nominations.

17 April: March inflation figures released.

23 April: Noon deadline for receipt of late absent-voting applications, on health grounds.

1 May: General election.

7 May: New Parliament meets for swearing-in of MPs and election of Speaker.

14 May: State opening of Parliament, with Queen's Speech programme of newly elected Government.

## Sir James's effusive acolytes off to an affluent start

Tony Heath

If enthusiasm won votes, the clutch of Referendum Party prospective candidates who gathered in Ludlow, Shropshire, yesterday could at least count on saving their deposits. Whether any will be elected on 1 May is more debatable.

The 15 hopefuls met in surroundings that would please Sir James Goldsmith, their benef-

actor. The 17th-century Feathers Hotel is a place of affluence, with a four-poster room costing £95. In the Prince Charles suite, the party organiser, Gareth Davies, told his troops: "If Sir James hadn't set up the party, I would. The difference is that in that case you probably wouldn't have heard of it."

Mr Davies is dedicated: "I've put my business – I develop and market board-games – on hold

to work full-time for the party." His most successful game, Spreadbet, offers a gamble as tricky as one undertaken by Clive Easton, the party's banner-carrier in Hereford.

An airline pilot, he is on unpaid leave. "I can't put my hand on my heart and forecast what will happen. But I've resigned from the Conservative Party because I'm disgusted at their European policy," he said.

Hereford is held by Colin Shephard for the Tories with a 3,413 majority.

Liz Phillips was there, blazing enthusiasm, in her burgundy sweater bearing the legend: "Let the people decide". A caterer, she is contesting Brecon and Radnorshire, where the three big parties are slugging it out. The incumbent Tory, Jonathan Evans, has a majority of 130. Ms Phillips says Tory

defectors outnumber Labour and Liberal Democrat switchers. "I'm in there to win. I've never belonged to a political party and although I voted Conservative and Liberal in the past, the parties are all selling Britain short over Europe," she said.

Anthony Parkin, white-haired and urbane, is one of the party's most intriguing characters. He worked for the BBC for 37 years producing agricultural programmes and editing *The Archers*, a story of country folk not unlike people in the Leominster constituency where his target is the Tory arch-Euro enthusiast Sir Peter Temple-Morris, who sits on a 16,680 majority. Mr Parkin was cautiously optimistic: "Naturally, we aim for success. The only question of importance is to save Britain's sovereignty."

## Scargill stands against Howarth

The miners' leader Arthur Scargill has announced that he will stand as Socialist Labour Party candidate in Newport East in protest at the selection on Sunday of Alan Howarth as Labour candidate.

Mr Scargill was said to be appalled at the choice of Mr Howarth, who crossed the floor to join Labour on the eve of the 1995 Conservative Party conference. "The constituency is being offered the choice of a Tory and an ex-Tory fighting on Tory policies. It's a disgrace," David Prosser, the SLP's Welsh secretary claimed.

Tony Heath

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## news



Historic occasion: The Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich greeting a guest at his 70th birthday party in London yesterday. In 1997, its centenary year, EMI has issued a set of 13 compact discs, *Rostropovich: The Russian years 1950-1974*, remastered from digital audio tapes. Photograph: Geraint Lewis

## Rise in violence overshadows fall in crime

Jason Bennetto  
Crime Correspondent

A small drop in the number of recorded crimes committed last year was overshadowed yesterday by the disclosure that violent offences rose by 11 per cent in the same period.

The increase of 33,400 violent crimes to 344,300 was the highest rise for seven years. The Home Office's annual statistics also revealed that the offences that involved wounding or other acts that endangered life increased by 16.5 per cent, and sex crimes, including rape, continued to rise in frequency.

Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, seized on the reduction in the total number of offences

by 1.3 per cent to about five million, with notable drops in property and car crime, as evidence that his policies were working. It was the fourth consecutive annual drop – the first time this has happened since 1990.

But Labour claimed that the rise in violent crime and the near-doubling in the offences total since the Tories came to power in 1979 proved that the Conservative party's law and order initiatives have failed.

The 1996 Notifiable Offences for England and Wales, published yesterday, revealed a mix bag of achievement for the country's police forces.

Most worrying was the growing number of violent acts. Although this category only makes up seven per cent of the total number of crimes – nine out of ten offences are against property – they have a huge impact on the victims.

Offences against the person, such as mugging, increased by 26,500 to about 240,000, and more serious offences went up 17 per cent to 22,400. The number of sexual offences increased by three per cent. This included a 15 per cent increase in the number of female rapes, which has continued to go up by an average of 10 per cent for the past decade, to 22,700. Male rapes rose by 50 per cent to 227.

Fraud and robbery also saw small increases.

On the positive side, the police have continued their success in driving down the number of vehicle crimes – a two per cent drop – and burglary, which saw a six per cent decline.

There were big regional dif-

ferences in crime fighting. Northumbria recorded a 13 per cent annual fall – its fifth in a row – while Durham, Cheshire, North Yorkshire, and Dorset all had about a 10 per cent decline.

The Metropolitan Police was the only urban force to record more crime in 1996 than in 1995, up three per cent to 840,000. Sussex and Norfolk both saw seven per cent increases in all reported crime, while Bedfordshire and Gwent recorded a 7.8 per cent rise in violent crime.

All the figures are an under-estimation because many crimes are not reported or recorded. Michael Howard argued that some of the increase in violent crime was due to more people reporting offences.

He added: "We believe that these figures indicate a real success story. They bear testimony to the steadfast efforts of the police to the work of those involved in community initiatives to fight crime, and to the success of our policies to tackle crime and protect the public."

But Jack Straw, the shadow Home Secretary, said: "The modest reduction in overall crime has to be seen against a mountainous increase in crime and disorder since the Conservatives took office."

The police welcome the drop in total crimes but Fred Broughton, chairman of the Police Federation, said: "I am very concerned by the increase in reported robberies and violence against the person. These are the crimes that worry the public most of all."

## More teenagers hooked on heroin

Jason Bennetto

Growing numbers of teenagers are turning to heroin, according to police statistics released yesterday which show that the number of seizures of the drug rose by 41 per cent last year.

Boys and girls aged 12 and 13 are turning to prostitution to feed their heroin addiction, one police chief said.

The warnings came as Customs and Excise announced that the total amount of drugs seized in 1996 had increased by more than 60 per cent over the previous year to a record 80 tonnes – worth about £500m.

Joint police and customs figures, published yesterday, also revealed a record rise in the amount of cannabis seized, sharp increases in the amount of amphetamines recovered and a continuing upward trend in cocaine, but a surprise drop in ecstasy.

Heroin, however, was identified as the drug causing the most concern. The police in England and Wales made 7,880 seizures last year and while the amount recovered by Customs officers was down on the record

total of 1995 they still believe the long-term trend is up. Drug agencies estimate that only 10 per cent of the heroin that comes into Britain is intercepted en route.

Keith Hellawell, Chief Constable of West Yorkshire and drugs spokesman for the Association of Chief Police Officers, said: "The worrying trend is the use of heroin on the street. The cost in some cities is the same as cannabis. More younger people are becoming addicted to heroin and committing crime to feed their habit. Young females are having to prostitute themselves to feed their habit."

"We now tragically see it's relatively common for 12 and 13-year-old prostitutes on the street, which also allows paedophiles to prey on them."

He added that the heroin addicts were now using stolen electrical goods to barter directly with drug dealers. "A television or video will buy four or five wraps of heroin," he said.

Seizures of cannabis by customs rose by 46 per cent to 76 tonnes, making it by far the most popular drug, although police action dropped slightly.

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# Gummer says no to deep-level atomic lab

**Nicholas Schoon**  
Environment Correspondent

Britain's nuclear-waste disposal plans were thrown into confusion last night after John Gummer, the Secretary of State for the Environment, rejected plans for an underground test laboratory near Sellafield which would have paved the way for a subterranean radioactive dump on the same site.

His surprise decision, the first time the industry has lost a major public-planning battle,

delighted environmental groups and local protesters in Cumbria. But it also put a question mark over the policy of building a £2.5bn, 3,000 feet deep system of caverns for nuclear waste.

Nirex, the waste-disposal company owned by the nation's nuclear industry, has spent more than £400m, and many years, working up plans for the laboratory to study disposal of intermediate-level nuclear waste at Gosforth in Cumbria. Now it may have to spend years gathering more scientific

data to prove the safety of its plans, while redrawing plans to reduce the impact the laboratory would have on the Lake District National Park.

Alternatively, it will have to

start planning a laboratory and dump at another site and encounter fresh opposition. Its second choice is at another nuclear site, Dounreay in Caithness, Scotland. But the company also has a secret list of 12 other sites where the rocks may be suitable for a deep-level dump.

For more than 20 years successive governments and the nuclear industry have been trying to find a publicly acceptable way of disposing of intermediate-level radioactive wastes, which remain highly dangerous for tens of thousands of years.

A volume of intermediate-

level waste equivalent in size to a block of flats has built up from Britain's nuclear power and defence forces and is stored on the surface, mostly at BNFL's Sellafield site. Five times as much again will arise over the next half century.

Mr Gummer's decision follows a lengthy public inquiry which ended a year ago. Yesterday, Nirex said: "We're obviously very disappointed."

Mr Gummer said that the poor design, poor layout and access arrangements on the surface and damage to the national park were reasons enough to reject Nirex's plans, along with the fact that the work would harm a nearby group of badgers. But he added: "I remain concerned about the scientific uncertainties and technical deficiencies in the proposals presented by

Nirex which would also justify rejection of this appeal." He also had doubts about the process by which Nirex had chosen the site.

Friends of the Earth hailed "an historic victory" and said it wanted plans for an underground dump to be dropped for several decades, with the waste stored and monitored on the surface while technology develops.

Michael Meacher, Labour's environmental protection spokesman, said the policy of deep-level disposal still "fails to make sense". But Mr Gummer's rejection of the laboratory was inevitable, he added, following the revelation in a leaked memo that Nirex was itself divided on whether it had gathered enough scientific data to show how water would flow through the rocks around the laboratory and the subsequent dump. "It's a very serious setback towards a long-term solution," he said.

Nirex's planning application was refused by Cumbria County Council and opposed by other local councils, triggering the

planning inquiry. The laboratory was also opposed by the Irish government, which said it would take international court action if Nirex was allowed to go ahead.

Martin Forwood, of the campaign group Cumbrians Opposed to a Nuclear Environment, said: "My advice to other local residents facing this problem in the future would be: 'Fight them every inch of the way.' Dick Wright, of the Gosforth Action Group, added that Nirex should "pack their bags and walk away from Sellafield".

## Trendy young things show off wacky designs

**Nicole Veash**

After witnessing the arch-glamour displayed by haute couture's established designers in the past few weeks, fashion hunters are advised to visit Alternative Fashion Week, where the top designers of tomorrow are showing their collections.

Trendy old Spitalfields Market, in the East End of London, is the venue for the 'wacky, decadent and sometimes wearable' creations. Now in its fifth year, show organisers claim to be free of the pretensions surrounding the fashion business.

Liz Weston, of Alternative Arts, the show's organiser, said: "Anyone can come to see the collections. Not only is it free, but people are not pressurised into buying anything. They can just enjoy what is on offer. There is no mystique about fashion shows."

Some of the designers are still at college, but most have launched their own labels, wanting to remain independent of the mainstream.

Often art forms in themselves; the alternative fashions can be looked upon as theatrical costumes. But for those wanting to pick up some relatively cheap, but delicately stitched creations, there are a few clothes which are wearable.

"A lot of our designs tend to indicate trends later seen by mainstream designers, like Vivienne Westwood or Alexander McQueen," Ms Weston said.

"But I have to admit that some of the clothes are just outrageous. Although I can't imagine people wearing them, ideas always filter down to the high street, eventually."

Among the outfits displayed was a purple tasseled and gold corset creation designed by 24-year-old Abby Grewcock, who studied fashion and design at Loughborough College of Art and Design in Leicestershire.

The costume is part of her first collection, which is heavily influenced by the circus tradition, which she says is the inspiration behind her clothes.

Anyone wanting to attend any of the shows can call 0171 375 0441, for details.



Tight fit: A model wearing an Abby Grewcock outfit. Her designs are influenced by the circus tradition. Photograph: Philip Meech

## Britain to spend £2bn on three new nuclear submarines

**Christopher Bellamy**  
Defence Correspondent

In what was probably its last major defence announcement before the general election, the Government yesterday committed the nation to spending £2bn on three new nuclear-powered submarines - a new class to be called 'Astute', because the Navy wants to begin the new millennium with the letter 'A'.

Military experts said the order is really costing £3bn as four conventionally powered Urophorus class submarines, which cost £1 bn, were originally designed to do many of the same jobs but were then declared surplus. They are still at Barrow-in-Furness, in Cumbria, waiting to be sold.

There is also doubt whether nuclear-powered submarines, designed to hunt Soviet submarines in the North Atlantic, are necessary for the operations Britain is likely to conduct when the first new submarines come into service in 2005.

But MoD sources said the new submarines will be much more economical as they will never need to be refuelled during their 25-30-year life.

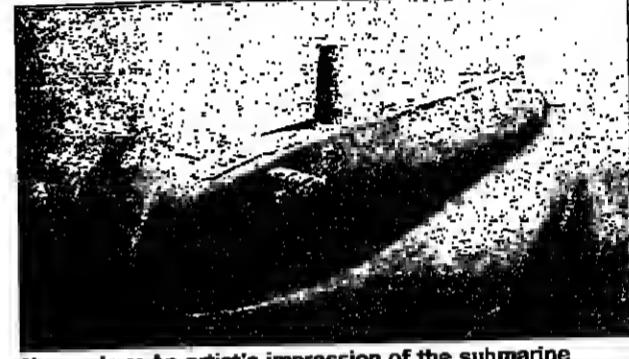
The submarines are not being built with separate accommodation for women. The MoD had previously said women would serve in submarines when suitable accommodation was available.

Of the 100 berths on board the new submarines, 18 will have to be shared between men working shifts, the procedure known as "hot bunking".

Defence Procurement Minister James Arbuthnot told Parliament the order would be placed with GEC-Marconi as the prime contractor responsible for designing and building the submarines and their equipment, and maintaining them for the first four-and-a-half years.

It is the first time major warships have been built on a prime contractor basis. Mr Arbuthnot said the order will help sustain about 7,000 jobs at the Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering (VSEL) yard at Barrow-in-Furness, and in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Derby, Bath and Bristol.

GEC-Marconi designed the submarines in competition with VSEL. But then Lord Weinstock, GEC's managing director, bought VSEL, enabling



New nukes: An artist's impression of the submarine

the MoD to combine the benefits of innovative design from GEC-Marconi - these are the first submarines they have designed - and VSEL's shipbuilding experience.

At 6,000 tons, the new Astute Class submarines will be able to carry land-attack cruise missiles with conventional warheads which can be fired from their torpedo tubes.

The Navy currently has four ballistic missile-firing Vanguard submarines and 12 nuclear-powered hunter-killers; five of the ageing Swiftsure class and seven Trafalgars. The Astutes are to replace the Swiftsures, so another two will be ordered later, unless the next government decides they are not needed.

In an almost unprecedented triumph for British arms sales, the US Marines are expected to buy hundreds of new artillery pieces of British design at a cost of \$500m (£314 m).

The US military normally buys US weapons, although the Marines also bought a version of the British Harrier jump jet. Some reports indicated that the Pentagon might announce the order last night.

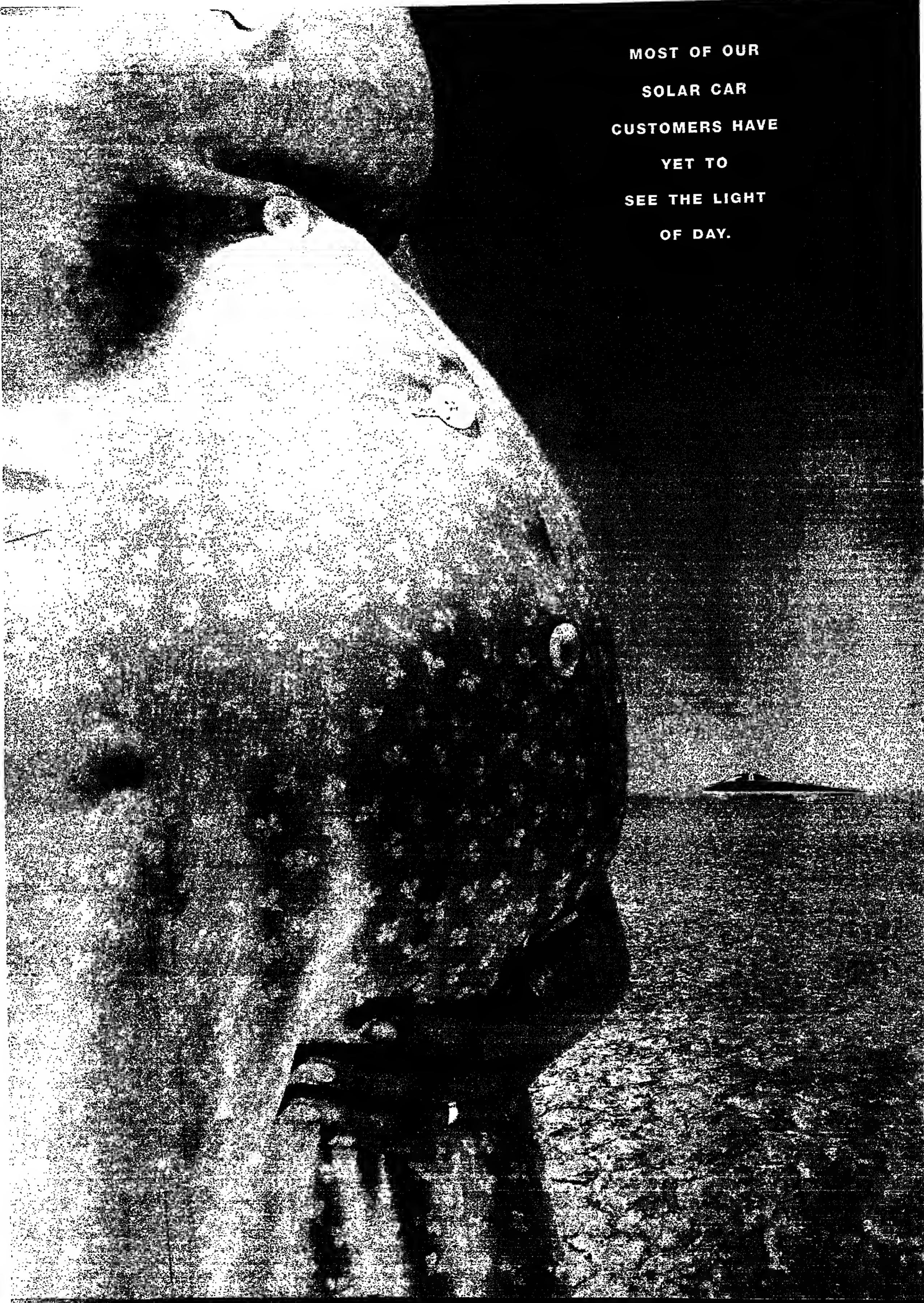
The Marines want a powerful gun firing 155mm standard NATO ammunition which can be carried around by helicopter and will be used by the Light Towed Howitzer, developed by Royal Ordnance, or the Ultra Lightweight Field Howitzer, developed by VSEL.



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**HONDA**

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## Kray fans turn out to reconcile Ronnie with God

Clare Garner

The legend of the Krays has spread to a second generation, as junior followers are brought up to worship and adore the gangster twins. Six-year-old Ryan knelt at the grave of Ronnie Kray and, with as much ceremony as he could summon, laid a series of white carnations at the foot of the granite slab.

"Why me?" he asked his mother, as the pack of photographers zoomed in on him. "Put these in the pot, yeah," replied Nikki, 32, whose uncle "used to knock around with Reg".

It was a perfect spring day. The avenues of daffodils in Chingford Mount cemetery and the song of birds ringing in the air were a million miles away from the murky underworld in which the Krays operated. But, as the words engraved on a plaque on Ronnie's grave said: "The kiss of the sun for pardon, the song of the bird for mirth, one is nearer to God in a garden than anywhere else on earth."

The congregation had gathered together "to try and help reconcile Ron with God and help him find peace," according to the Rev Ken Rimmer, vicar of St Matthew's in Bethnal Green, east London, who was leading the service at 11am yesterday. The occasion marked the second anniversary of the death of Ronnie Kray, but unlike at the funeral two years ago, when east London was heaving with crowds, attendance was scanty.

It was not an A-list celebrity event. There was no Frankie Fraser, no Barbara Windsor and no Mike Reid, all celebrated supporters of the Krays, though John Redgrave, second cousin to the actress Vanessa, felt sure there would be a fuller turn-out next year, particularly if Reg was out of prison.

As the synthesiser keyboard accompaniment to "Abide with me" peeled off, the 40-odd followers stared intently at the decorated grave. The formal proceedings were over, but Ryan was none the wiser why he was there. "It's for Ronnie," Nikki said. "They love 'im. They wouldn't be here otherwise."

"What, these kids love 'im?" asked Ryan, pointing at a pair of five-year-old twins. "Yeah. All these kids love 'im and when you grow up, your kids will love them too."

Others at the memorial service were more clued up. Many knew the protagonists personally. David Courtney, 35, knew "the men not the myth". "I do all the work for the Krays – good and bad," he said, blue eyes twinkling.

Charlie Kray, 70, Ronnie's elder brother, who is remanded in custody awaiting trial on charges of taking part in an alleged cocaine ring, was Mr Courtney's "next-door-neighbour" in prison. "I look after him [Charlie] when he's home and I look after him when he's in," boasted Mr Courtney. "I just got 'not guilty,'" he confirmed, a mischievous look on his face. "Quite rightly so. Crime doesn't pay. I had faith in the British justice system."



Signs of the times: A fan wearing two of the Kray brothers' autographs and portraits at a memorial service held on the second anniversary of Ronnie's death  
Photograph: Philip Meech

## Boots sued over asbestos deaths

Ian Burrow

Boots is being sued by the relatives of eight women who died from asbestos-related cancer after being exposed to the material at three Nottingham factories while making gas masks in the Second World War.

Solicitors acting for the claimants said 67 women from the 1,200-strong workforce producing gas masks with asbestos filters between 1937 and 1945 had died from the rare cancer mesothelioma, which is only caused by exposure to asbestos. Some were found to have a billion fibres of asbestos in every

gram of lung tissue, Richard Meenan, of London solicitors Leigh, Day & Co, said.

Mesothelioma is untreatable and results in a painful death as a cancerous tumour envelopes the lungs and crushes them until they collapse.

Boots denies any liability, saying it was one of several companies required by the wartime government to assemble masks which were made to its specifications. Risks associated with mesothelioma had not then been identified and the safety precautions adopted by Boots were considered to set the industry standard, the company argued.

The six claims lodged yesterday will go with two others to the High Court next week, where a timetable is due to be set for a forthcoming trial.

One of the claimants, Elaine Brooks, 44, watched her mother, Constance Thompson, die. She said: "She went from 14 stone to 6 stone and became so delirious that she did not know who anyone was. She had scars all down her back from the operations on her lungs and her hair all fell out. She just could not breathe or do anything."

Mrs Thompson, who worked on the gas-mask production lines for three years in her early twenties, died from mesothelioma in 1967, aged 50. Mesothelioma often takes 15 years to develop but is usually fatal within two years.

In a statement issued yesterday Boots said: "The Boots Company has great sympathy for those affected by asbestos... but we maintain that all reasonable precautions were taken to protect the workforce given both the level of knowledge available at the time and the wartime national emergency."

### DAILY POEM

From Kyrie

By Ellen Bryant Voigt

If doubts have wintered over in your house,  
they won't go out. The residue in the cupboard  
means they've built a nest of your neglect,  
and fattened in it, and multiply, like mice.  
Soft gray velvet scurries on the floor?  
The national cat licks a foot and looks away.  
All dread passes – any harm they do  
is mostly out of sight, and it's not just  
your failure anyway.

a plausible God  
is a God of rapture, if not the falcon  
at least the small decorative ribbon snake  
that sleeps in the bay against the northern wall.  
But look: what drips like a limp Chinese moustache  
at the lips of the cat coming up the cellar stairs?

Kyrie is a narrative sequence of blank-verse sonnets about the effect on Americans of this century's "forgotten pandemic": the influenza outbreaks of 1918-1919, which killed more than 25 million people around the globe as the First World War ended. Ellen Bryant Voigt's book was shortlisted for the United States National Book Critics Circle award and is published in this country by W W Norton (£8.95).

## Firefighter who was harassed wins £200,000

Nicole Veash

A former female firefighter yesterday accepted £200,000 damages in one of the largest payouts for sexual discrimination, three years after a tribunal decided that her life had been devastated by harassment.

Tania Clayton, 31, was victimised by male colleagues in a "deeply ingrained" anti-female culture where she was called "tart" and "stupid fucking cow", while being ordered to make tea for firemen. When her case came before an industrial tribunal in 1994, the Hereford and Worcester Fire Service was condemned for the "most appalling discrimination".

Mrs Clayton, who now lives with her parents in Wiltshire, joined the Blue Watch, Hereford, in 1989 after five years' exemplary service in the Women's Royal Army Corps. She served under sub-officer Ronald East, who routinely victimised her in front of male colleagues and advised her to get a job in a kitchen, the tribunal was told. In June 1990, she transferred to Worcester but two years later returned to Hereford, this time assigned to Green Watch, where the harassment resumed.

In one incident she was forced to sit on a turntable ladder 100ft in the air and spun round for more than an hour, in an attempt to break her confidence. Yesterday, after 90 minutes negotiation in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, her legal team agreed the settlement assigned to her.

Mrs Clayton, who blamed the collapse of her marriage on the trauma, said she was relieved her ordeal was over: "It has not really sunk in yet, but it was horrible returning to the place

where I won my case. I cannot really recall any specific incident which occurred in the force which drove me out. It was a combination of everything – a sort of wearing-down process."

And she hoped her huge settlement – the largest non-military settlement – would make other authorities think twice before allowing sexual discrimination within their fire brigades.

Kevin McNamara, a spokesman for Hereford and Worcester County Council, said: "This has been a difficult



Tania Clayton: Treated for depression due to her ordeal

and long-running process for both sides. Lessons needed to be learned and new management at the top of our fire service has ensured that the brigade has not stood still."

Janet Gaymer, head of employment law for solicitors Simmonds and Simmonds, said: "This woman has suffered harassment for five years and the settlement obviously reflects the time she had to endure the bullying. In sexual harassment cases tribunals tend to award aggravated damages, mirroring the mental and phys-

ical distress caused to the individual."

Mrs Clayton, who is still employed since leaving the force in March 1994, has received treatment in a psychiatric hospital for depression resulting from the ordeal. She said: "I just want to get a place of my own with a garden where I can spend some time with my Staffordshire bull terrier, George, and sort out my life."

John Gordon, her Fire Brigade Union representative, said: "This is a victory tinged with sadness. Tania's life has been devastated. The message from the FBU to employers is that this kind of despicable behaviour will not be tolerated and must be stopped."

"She has lost her marriage, her health and her livelihood and it was a very reasonable claim in the circumstances."

The average payout for a discrimination case in the workplace is about £4,000. But after the £11,000 statutory limit was removed in 1995 awards have been higher.

Ministry of Defence settlements have been larger in pregnancy dismissal cases because the armed forces have been unlawfully making pregnant women leave since 1978. However, the average MoD award is only £11,000. Major Helen Homewood got £300,000 in 1994, one of the highest payouts. That year Josephine Green, a former Royal Navy nurse, was awarded £350,000 after she was sacked for becoming pregnant by a Roman Catholic priest.

In 1981, Helen Bamber, a Euro-honda dealer received £81,000 from a Japanese company for sexual discrimination after discovering she earned £127,000 less than her male colleagues.

## Ossie Clark's killer jailed

The Sixties fashion guru Ossie Clark was killed by his former boyfriend in a frenzied knife attack because he believed the designer was the devil, the Old Bailey was told yesterday, writes Nicole Veash.

Italian-born Diego Cogolato, 29, admitted manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility and was jailed for six years by Mr Justice Douglas Brown.

The court heard that Cogolato suffered a "transient psychotic episode", while repeatedly stabbing Mr Clark.

craftsman he became an icon of his age and his clothes were described as "sex incarnate".

He won a place at Manchester School of Art, where he was classmate with David Hockney, took up fashion design and went on to the Royal College of Art in 1961.

Seven years later, he married textile designer Celia Birtwell. The couple, who later divorced, had two sons.

But his golden era ended in 1974 and by the early 1980s he was bankrupt, reduced to sleeping on friends' sofas.

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## Annan displays reform zeal by cutting UN flab

David Usborne  
New York

Under pressure from Washington to show his credentials as a reformer, the new Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, yesterday unveiled a 10-point plan to streamline the organisation by cutting jobs and phasing out departments.

Most notably, Mr Annan has ordered the elimination of an additional 1,000 posts from the

United Nations bureaucracy from an already slimmed-down workforce of 9,000. He has set a 1998-99 budget, meanwhile, that will be \$123m (£76m) lower than the previous one.

By showing his willingness to cut what has traditionally been an ever-expanding budget, Mr Annan is hoping to quell charges that the UN soaks up too much money.

In a veiled appeal to the United States to respond by paying

its \$1.3bn in UN debts, he said: "We will deliver [on reform] and I hope that they will deliver their part of the bargain".

Other steps include merging three departments dealing with economic and social issues at UN headquarters into one and a commitment to revamp the secretariat's much-criticised information department.

The Secretary General is also asking for the consolidation of all UN agencies in beneficiary

countries with the establishment of single UN premises and the appointment of one UN special representative per country. The European Union has lobbied hard for such a change.

The 10 points represent the most obvious and easiest elements of reform. But Mr Kofi's proposals for broader changes, which will have to be approved by the UN membership, are still to come. They are certain to be more problematic.

Mr Annan has promised to address these issues in a comprehensive package of proposals in July. They include expanding the Security Council membership, consolidating some of the myriad UN agencies around the world and re-jigging the formula for national contributions to the budget.

Yesterday's first steps were welcomed by Sir John Weston, the British ambassador. "It shows he has the reform bit

between his teeth and we shall certainly be supporting them," he said.

Sir John also directed some comments at members of Congress who insist on setting standards, or so-called benchmarks, for reform before considering the payment of dues. "I hope these proposals get support from all quarters," he said, "and that we can all approve them instead of constantly making demands for more benchmarks".

## Revitalised Yeltsin welcomes free-market whizzkid into fold

Reformer wins Cabinet spot, but grumbles ahead of summit with Clinton

Phil Reeves  
Moscow

Boris Yeltsin yesterday lived up to his vow to introduce fresh reformist blood into his government by appointing one of Russia's most influential and youthful regional governors to high office.

The elevation of 37-year-old Boris Nemtsov is evidence that the revitalised President is embarking on his delayed second term with the apparently genuine intention of accelerating Russia's patchy economic reforms.

Although the move will be welcomed in the West, applause will have been muted yesterday as Mr Yeltsin also gave a prolonged television interview ahead of Thursday's Helsinki summit with Bill Clinton, in which the two presidents will seek to resolve their many differences over Nato expansion.

In it, Mr Yeltsin grumbled about Washington's treatment of Moscow on several fronts, suggesting it had failed to advance its membership to international organisations and was slow to "invest" in Russia. "I don't want a return to the Cold War, I don't want it and our people don't want it," said Mr Yeltsin. "But for that there must be equal conditions in the world order."

Mr Nemtsov's new job will be that of First Deputy Prime Minister, a post which appears to be on level footing with his fellow economic reformer Anatoly Chubais as number two in the Russian government under Viktor Chernomyrdin, the Prime Minister. His appointment comes after days of speculation about Mr Yeltsin's cabinet reshuffle, which appears to be proving extremely tricky. Yevgeny Kiselyov, a top TV commentator with close links to the Kremlin, has described it as "the toughest cabinet negotiation ... since the collapse of the Soviet Union."

The arrival in government of Mr Nemtsov — seen by many as the whizzkid of free market



Comeback! President Clinton arriving back at the White House after surgery on his knee, ahead of his Thursday summit with Boris Yeltsin

Photograph: Ruth Fremson/PA

reforms — may also herald a confrontation with Mr Chernomyrdin, a former gas industry executive whose power base is rooted in the mighty energy sector. Mr Nemtsov's brief covers social welfare, but it also includes overhauling government monopolies, including gas and electricity. Mr Chubais, meanwhile, will also be Finance Minister.

Mr Nemtsov has been tipped as material for high office — possibly eventually the presidency — for several years. After becoming governor in Nizhny Novgorod in 1991, he has steadily risen to national stature; when he visited London recently, Cabinet ministers were willing to meet him. Under the

Soviet Union, Nizhny Novgorod was a closed city called Gorky, where the dissident Andrei Sakharov spent years in exile. Mr Nemtsov is credited with severing it from its Communist legacy.

Although he has strong democratic credentials, he — like Mr Chubais — has proved himself capable of an iron pragmatism when the need arises. Several years ago, he fell out with Nizhny Novgorod's mayor, another reformer. Local elections, which the mayor was certain to win, were abruptly cancelled. Shortly after the mayor was fired by Boris Yeltsin, Mr Nemtsov's position close to the pinnacle of power will do nothing to assuage the

fury of the Communists and nationalists in parliament, who are fuming over the rise of their *bête noire*, Mr Chubais, whose hated for his role in Russia's privatisation.

Several other more powerful noses may also be out of joint: Mr Nemtsov's first suggestion in office should be banned from using imported cars, depriving them of their beloved Rolls Royces and Mercedes.

Nor is the neo-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky likely to be rejoicing; in one celebrated incident, he threw a glass of orange juice in Mr Nemtsov's face during a TV debate, only to have the compliment briskly returned.

## Rebels aim for Zaire's second city as coup fears sweep capital

Ed O'Loughlin  
Goma

Zairean rebels in Goma, their provisional capital, announced yesterday that their next objective would be Lubumbashi, capital of the copper-rich Shaba province. But with the capital Kinshasa awash with rumours of imminent coups, the rest of Zaire could fall into their hands before they even move to take it.

Two days after rebels captured Kisangani, Zaire's third largest city, the country's ageing President Mobutu Sese Seko is reported to be critically ill in a French hospital. Meanwhile, the power is draining from his regime in Kinshasa, as defiant rebels swarm westward from the Rwandan border.

Kinshasa may be the brains of Mobutu's Zaire, but by capturing Kisangani, Laurent Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the liberation of Congo/Zaire seemed to have tipped out its heart. With Kisangani in their hands, the rebels are now poised to continue their advance into strategic mineral regions and perhaps Kinshasa itself.

Although Kisangani was an important objective in itself, for the rebels it also represented an opportunity to rout the best forces Mr Mobutu could send to meet them. These included several thousand members of the exiled Rwanda Huzi army and militias and — the rebels



Handover: Zairean troops surrender weapons to rebels at Kisangani

Photograph: Reuters

chain — fighters from the Angolan Unita rebel movement. The city was the base for the government's troops and foreign — mainly Serb and Croat — mercenaries whom President Mobutu ordered to crush Mr Kabila's eastern rebels. Its airport was, until Saturday morning, the last airfield in eastern Zaire still in government hands.

The capture of Kisangani is a crippling blow to any plans the government might have had for launching another offensive. Worse, its geographical position astride the Congo River system offers fresh opportunities to move against diamond-rich Kasai province in the south and Kinshasa in the west.

Zaire and its allies claim that the rebels' success is due to direct support from the governments of Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi, ethnically linked to many of the rebels and politically at odds with Mr Mobutu's regime. Zaire's neighbours deny this and accuse it of seeking excuses for the indiscipline and corruption of its own beggarized army.

Most towns on the road to Kisangani have been captured after a light bombardment and with little fight — the rebels seem content to allow the demoralised Zairean and Rwandan Huzi troops to loot and flee. According to one military observer the rebel army's most

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## obituaries / gazette

# Joseph Fuchs

The American violinist Joseph Fuchs enjoyed a performing career that spanned almost 70 years – a phenomenon in the history of the instrument. His final Carnegie Hall recital was in 1992 and he last played in a concert at the Juilliard School of Music in New York in 1995. His style of playing was described by Boris Schwarz as “vigorous and large-scaled, with a masterful technique and a rich, warm tone”. He was also a fine teacher and had been a professor at the Juilliard since 1946.

Fuchs was born in New York City into an immigrant Polish-Jewish family who loved music, and his father, a frustrated vi-

olinist, quickly noticed his son’s budding talent. At the age of three he would repeat the melodies he heard in the synagogue and if anyone sang out of tune he would cover his ears. His introduction to the violin came about by sheer accident. At the age of three and a half, he fell off the kitchen table and received a compound fracture of the left elbow. His arm was in a plaster cast for three months, after which the doctor suggested he should have violin lessons as therapy.

His progress was so rapid that, after some initial instruction from his father, he had lessons with Mark Fonaroff,

### LaVern Baker

“LaVern’s delivery could rival anyone’s,” says the record producer Jerry Wexler of the singer LaVern Baker in his autobiography, *Rhythms and the Blues*. “I loved her because she stood smack dab in the middle of the great tradition of Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith.”

She was born Delores Williams in 1929, in Chicago. Her aunt, Marilyn Baker, recorded for the RCA record label and she wanted to be like her. At the age of 11, she made her first record, “When I’m in a Crying Mood”, with the band-leader Fletcher Henderson. During her teens, she recorded for Okeh Records and she was nicknamed “Little Miss Shancropper” during her three-year residency at the Flame Showbar in Detroit. Her passionate delivery inspired another resident there, Johnnie Ray.

Atlantic Records was building a powerful roster of black R & B artists including Big Joe Turner, Ray Charles and the Drifters, and Baker signed with the label in 1953. Her single “Soul On Fire”, released that year, was the first record to be produced by Jerry Wexler.

In 1955 she recorded a light-hearted novelty, “Twedde Dee”, which was an enormous R & B hit. It was copied note for note by a white performer, Georgia Gibbs, who took the song to No 2 in the US charts. At the time, the covering of black songs by white perform-

ers was commonplace but Baker was furious and lobbied polka fans to allow copyrights on song arrangements.

Her novelty hits like “Jim Dandy” (1956) and “Jim Dandy Got Married” (1957) obscured the fact that she was a great R & B vocalist: her 1958 album, *LaVern Baker Sings Bessie Smith*, was a confident blend of R & B and jazz. She resented being called a rock’n’roll singer – and a novelty one at that – but she also appeared in the films, *Rock! Rock! Rock!* (1957) and *Mr Rock’n’Roll* (1957) where her glamorous, sophisticated appearance was eight years away from the new kids on the block.

On one package tour, she was so irritated by the 15-year-old Paul Anka’s adolescent high spirits that she had him tarred and feathered.

In 1959, she had a Top Ten pop hit with the ballad “I Cried a Tear”, but her most memorable performance was the gospel-singing “Saved” (1960), written by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. Who can forget its opening line, “I used to smoke, drink and dance the hoochie coo”? Certainly not Elvis Presley, who used the song in his 1968 comeback.

Baker managed a total of 20 records in the US Top 100 in her career, one of the later ones being a sophisticated version of Ma Rainey’s “See See Rider” in 1963. She also recorded with Ben E. King (“A Help Each Other

Romance”, 1960) and Jackie Wilson (“Think Twice”, 1965).

She entertained troops in Vietnam in the mid-Sixties, where she became ill, and then moved to the Philippines to recuperate, only returning to America for Atlantic’s 40th birthday celebrations in 1988. Following this, she recorded new songs for the films *Shag* (1988) and *Dick Tracy* (1990), and appeared on Broadway in the revue *Black and Blue*. In 1991, she was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and she followed the honour with a CD, *Live in Hollywood ’91*.

Baker had diabetes and, although she lost both her legs through the illness, she kept on performing. She cut “Jump into the Fire” for the tribute album to Harry Nilsson, *For the Love of Harry* (1995), and in December 1996 took part in a concert with Ben E. King, Little Eva and the Miracles to help with her medical expenses.

Sequel Records have embarked on an extensive reissue of her Atlantic catalogue, with many of the tracks appearing in the UK for the first time. Two albums have been released to date and the remaining five should appear within the next few weeks.

Spencer Leigh

*Delores Williams (LaVern Baker), singer; born Chicago, Illinois 11 November 1929; married; died New York 10 March 1997.*

nerve had caused the muscle between the third and fourth finger of the left hand to atrophy, and if he kept playing he would develop a claw hand. So he agreed to an operation where some nerve tissue was transplanted from the back of the arm to the front. Everyone doubted that the operation would be a success, but he was prepared to take the risk and within a year he was not only playing again but had resigned from the leadership of the orchestra in order to follow a solo career.

From 1941 to 1943 he led the Primrose String Quartet, with Josef Gingold as second violin, the Scot William Primrose on

viola and Harvey Shapiro on cello. He made a successful Carnegie Hall debut in 1943 and during the Second World War was a tireless performer in military hospitals. At this time he was also co-founder of the Musicians’ Guild, a chamber music ensemble which he directed until 1956. From this point onwards he became constantly in demand as a soloist and toured extensively in Europe, appearing at the Prades Festival under Pablo Casals in 1953 and 1954 and in South America, the Soviet Union and Japan. In the United States he appeared as a soloist with every major American orchestra. He also played

at the opening concert of the Philharmonic Hall at the Lincoln Center in 1962.

Although his repertoire contained all the classic works, Fuchs was a great supporter of new music. He obtained a Ford Foundation grant in 1960 which enabled him to commission Walter Piston’s Violin Concerto, the premiere of which he gave that same year in Pittsburgh. He also gave first performances of works by a number of composers, including the revised version of Vaughan Williams’s Violin Sonata with Artur Balsam in 1969, and the posthumous American premiere of Bohuslav

Martini’s Sonata for two violins and piano in 1974. Martini also dedicated his *Madrigali* for violin and viola to Fuchs and his sister, Lillian, who premiered the work in 1947.

Fuchs was appointed Violin Professor at the Juilliard School of Music in 1946, and in 1971 he received the Artist Teacher’s Award from the American String Teachers’ Association. He retired in 1995, after which his students went to his apartment for their lessons. Fuchs was convinced that players make the best teachers. He would say: “You must have experience in order to put yourself in a student’s shoes.” He would also

quote the Russian violinist David Oistrakh who once, when visiting the Juilliard, was asked what was the best method of teaching, and replied: “I don’t teach by method but by example. When words run out I pick up the violin and play those 10 bars. They mean more to a talented student than all the words.” This, too, was Fuchs’s credo.

Margaret Campbell

*Joseph Fuchs, violinist; born New York 26 April 1901; married first Lillian Kessler (one daughter, marriage dissolved 1940), second Doris Levy (died 1997); died New York 14 March 1997.*

### James Stevens Cox

If James Stevens Cox’s main livelihood was to come from other sources, he remained a proud and active member of his hereditary profession: hairdressing and wigmaking.

He was bookseller, publisher, writer, archaeologist, local historian but, although he sold the family business in 1955, he remained chairman of the Hairdressers’ Registration Council, a regular contributor to the *Registered Hairdresser*, its quarterly journal, and one of the Chief Examiners in Ladies’ Hairdressing and Wigmaking for the City and Guilds Institute. In 1966 he published *An Illustrated Dictionary of Hairdressing and Wigmaking* (the book was

reissued in 1987).

There was a time when almost all booksellers were autodidacts. Stevens Cox was exceptional in that he was an autodidact before he was a bookseller, and he was, in a way, the last of his kind: those who teach themselves are few and far between (though they may become commoner).

His education thus began before he went to school. He was born in Bristol. There his parents, William George Cox and Anne Eugenia (née Stevens) traded at “Ye Olde Dutche House”, 67 Wine Street, where his grandmother, Mrs F Stevens, “practical hair worker and wig maker”, offered “All Kind of Ornamental Hair Work, Fringes, Partings, Transformations, Scalpettes, &c; kept in stock, or made to order at the shortest possible notice”.

But his father was an itinerant man, and his aunt still lived in the old family home, where the young Cox (not yet Stevens – he added the name to distinguish himself from another James Cox whose detention was unfairly inflicted on him at school) used to spend his holidays. When he was eight he found some old pottery while digging there in the garden; he took it back to Bristol, where the museum curator correctly identified it as Roman.

At Bristol Grammar School, where he went in 1910, he came under the influence of its remarkable headmaster, John Barron, who instilled taste and judgement rather than a syllabus; the BBC producer Douglas Cleverdon was another of the pupils whose lives he inspired. Stevens Cox left at 16 to join his parents’ business. If he had other ideas about his vocation, he kept them to himself.

Reading books, and (for a little pocket money went a long way then) buying them, was the staple of his life. One of his favourite haunts was the premises, two houses full of books for sale, with more and a private library in yet another house next door, of a second-hand bookseller called Matthews. Every plain surface was filled with books, and the further parts could only be reached by tunnelling through

book-piles. Mathews turned nothing away, and it was there that Stevens Cox acquired his remarkable knowledge of all the different kinds of book there were.

He might have remained a book-loving hairdresser, local historian but, although he sold the family business in 1955, he remained chairman of the Hairdressers’ Registration Council, a regular contributor to the *Registered Hairdresser*, its quarterly journal, and one of the Chief Examiners in Ladies’ Hairdressing and Wigmaking for the City and Guilds Institute. In 1966 he published *An Illustrated Dictionary of Hairdressing and Wigmaking* (the book was

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Baker: ‘I used to smoke, drink and dance the hoochie coo’



Stevens Cox: an autograph



Don Knotts faces up to Love’s animated fish in *The Incredible Mr Limpet*, 1964

Photograph: Denis Gifford Collection

Denis Gifford

*Harold Love, animator; born New York 1911; died Burbank, California 27 February 1997.*

went to Warner Brothers’ cartoon department for some \$150 plus a screen credit. His first original screenplay was called *Krazy Kat’s Shoe Shop*, a fan-tasy featuring the hero’s dream of a stock of shoes springing to life: cowboy boots performing a square dance, and so on. This new musical approach intrigued Mintz who encouraged Love to develop his fancies further. In all Love wrote and directed 20 Krazy Mousies.

Mintz now moved his studio to California, a problem for Harry Love who was still legally a minor, but soon his pay rose rapidly from the original \$12 a

week he earned as a junior to \$150 plus a screen credit. His first original screenplay was called *Krazy Kat’s Shoe Shop*, a fan-tasy featuring the hero’s dream of a stock of shoes springing to life: cowboy boots performing a square dance, and so on. This new musical approach intrigued Mintz who encouraged Love to develop his fancies further. In all Love wrote and directed 20 Krazy Mousies.

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At the beginning of 1995 Mrs Watters’s application to be ad-

mitted to the council’s housing list, with the result that she was not eligible to be selected as a council tenant.

# Forget numbers – this is about our future

The best sporting metaphor is not a steeplechase, or a marathon. The election campaign is more like the Tour de France or the Milk Race. Electoral excitement for the next few days will give way during Easter week to a rest period; then, from about 3 April onwards, the contest proper. Too long a run, a laggard segment of the electorate will cry: we have seen it, heard it, been there before.

Of course, we do "know" the leading candidates all too well, their grimes and their tics. We have also, if we care to look, amassed a lot of pointers towards their policies. We might ask for more: the National Institute of Economic and Social Research are the dustiest bunch of number-crunchers going and their matching of the tax take, spending commitments and debt (worryingly high for this stage of the economic cycle) says that for the next government the choices are stark and unavoidable. Either the incoming Chancellor sticks with spending plans, in which case there will be hell to pay on the health, education, defence or law-and-order fronts. Or else – economists do have a way with words – the incoming Chancellor will have to resort to fiscal tightening. Gordon Brown has promised out to raise income taxes, so that implies scrimping revenue from National Insurance and cuts in tax allowances, or other financial prestidigitation.

On finance we are going to have to whittle for clarity, just as nobody is going to prescribe for the physical crisis (the word, for once, is advised) in prison capacity, especially not the Tories, since Michael Howard is partly responsible for it. There is, however, something political leaders not only should but could give us without committing themselves to specific policies or tax regimes. It is even the kind of thing that is communicable in the truncated forms of modern media. It is a picture of Britain, five, 10 years on – the figurative presentation to British people of their own future, a symbolic description of what Blair's Britain, Major's Mainland, Ashdown's Albion, would look and feel like.

For all the shorness of American attention spans, at the last presidential election voters in the United States were presented with distinguished pictures of their future. Bill Clinton gets criticised in this country for his "touchy-feely" style – but only by critics who misunderstand the nature of the presidency as a locus of popular hope. His use of a "bridge" figure chimed with popular cultural imagery (*The Wizard of Oz*) and the immense optimism which is one of the United States' most attractive qualities. Blurry it may have been, but President Clinton offered a vision of a country moving into the new century with most of its historical dreams intact.

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"I have a dream". It is not just that modern British politicians are bad at preachy language. They may not actually have much of a picture of 21st-century Britain to present. Since the Liberal Democrats do not aspire to majority control, they can more easily be forgiven a certain gap in their rhetoric. Perhaps Paddy Ashdown came nearest to filling it at their last party conference with that peroration about his military service in defence of a liberal vision of Britain-in-Europe.

So far John Major has offered two tropes, one urban, one rural-nostalgic. Britain ought to be a place where a boy

from a humble home can join a bank, cross the Thames and end up furnishing his country home from B&Q. There is a set of powerful metaphors there to do with motivation, (inherited?) ability, and public services (good schools and stimulating teaching). But his talk, as yesterday about "revolution" would ring the more convincingly if it did not contradict the other Major figure, about cricket greens and policemen on bicycles, straight out of some chocolate-box rural idyll. For a large number of 21st-century Britons all our country will ever be is Emmerdale.

The Conservative Party will always do a roaring trade in Great British nostalgia. The trick is to combine it, as Mrs Thatcher did, with an appeal to cut-and-thrust economic modernisation. John Major's problem is Europe. As long as business keeps saying, however sotto voce, that Europe is our future, he cannot make use of the ready symbols of British-English nostalgic iconophilia.

But Europe – we learn from yesterday's Sun – is not necessarily part of Labour's vision for Britain. As recently as a year ago, Labour was going Dutch, conjuring a Britain that could be like the Netherlands, combining economic success with social concern. In such a Britain "European" coinages such as social exclusion would be taken seriously, and Islington would care about conditions of life in Sedgefield, Co Durham, both because economic progress depended on both moving onwards and upwards, and because of historical community spirit. But as Euro-enthusiasm has waned, so Labour's picture of Britain under Blair has become obscured.

What place should we associate with Blair: what kind of Britain? This is not the same as asking for policies, or even for a model of how government can affect the shape and colourings of civil society. It is to ask for some flavour of what ought to happen next – under Labour what will it smell like. Will schoolchildren be uniformed and obe-

dient or boisterously creative? Will their ambitions be questing and jagged, or smooth and safe and comforting?

Some readers (and at times we must sympathise with them) are bound to feel that there is going to be quite enough of all this election business over the next few weeks. But it could be an opportunity for the nation to learn something useful about itself as we gaze in the mirror the parties hold up, and look there for a picture of what we might become.

## A nation of Bolly bolsheviks?

They ought to be hanging out the Union flag in the streets of Reims. Britain is once again importing more champagne than any other single foreign buyer. Consumption levels are back up to their Eighties peak. British imports of the stuff rose by nearly a fifth between 1995 and last year and drinkers are buying more vintage wine. What explains this national love-affair with bubbles? It can't just be *Ah Fah* and the cult of Bolly. Either champagne is becoming more of an ordinary everyday drink for the nob, or else the habit is spreading through the social order. Is the nation on its way to champagne socialism? Heaven forfend.

## Howard tilts the scales of justice

Sir: Certain implications of the proposed change in categorising criminal offences appear to have been overlooked hitherto ("Howard under fire over plans to curb jury trial", 28 February; letter, 6 March). If offences are downgraded to being triable by magistrates only, with no option to the crown court, the following consequences will flow:

The advance disclosure rules will no longer apply to a summary-only offence and the prosecution will be under no obligation to provide advance information of the case against the defendant. Recent high-profile cases have clearly indicated the dangers inherent in inadequate disclosure to the defence, and it would be no comfort to a defendant facing trial to be told that the offences involve "only" a theft from a shop or "only" a minor assault if he or she feels aggrieved at the result.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain legal aid to represent defendant charged with summary-only offences. Each legal aid application is determined not only on the defendant's means but on the test of the "interest of justice", and many courts will routinely refuse legal aid on the basis that the perceived danger to the defendant is not high enough to warrant its grant.

PETER RHYNS JONES  
Solicitor  
Carmarthen

## Politics of the winning smile

Sir: Peter Popham is quite right to question the worth of the Oxford Union ("The state of the Union", 15 March). Being a Cambridge undergraduate, I can only assure you that the Cambridge Union seems, if anything, less effete.

The disappearance of the unions' political influence, however, is more due to their style of debate than students' lack of interest in politics. It is far too easy for a classical "This House believes ... " debate to become little more than a series of theatrical performances by the main speakers, failing to engage with the full range of opinions and issues.

One sees a similar phenomenon in the House of Commons, although lobbyists do help to keep eyes focused on policies rather than the TV audience. With the current trend towards "appearance and soundbite politics", the demise of the unions' debating reflects the wider tendency to avoid serious thinking discussion and turn instead towards empty wit and that winning smile.

DANIEL ROULSTONE  
Cambridge



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Law backs Ashdown on TV debate

Sir: In accepting the offer of a televised presidential-style debate involving John Major and Tony Blair, the Conservative Party chairman, Brian Mawhinney, has made clear that he does not want Paddy Ashdown to be involved. I can understand why, as it is the Liberal Democrats who pose such an obvious threat to Conservative MPs in a large number of marginal seats.

However, Dr Mawhinney clearly thinks he can ignore the law on this issue. In Scotland, in April 1995, John Major's *Panorama* broadcast was delayed until the close of polls in our local elections because it was considered to confer an unfair advantage. The principle here is the same: any debate must involve the leaders of all three main parties.

The objections of the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru could be accommodated by staging equivalent debates between their leaders and the respective Scottish and Welsh spokesmen of the main UK parties. Since neither of these parties puts up candidates in England there is no need for these debates to be broadcast there.

Obviously the format would reach draft proportions if the Green Party, the Natural Law Party, the UK Independence Party, the Referendum Party and the Pro-Life Alliance all insisted on participation, although doubtless Sir James Goldsmith could fund his own legal challenge.

Nevertheless, the principle remains: No matter how much Tony Blair agrees with John Major these days, it is not up to them to abolish the other opposition parties. Fairness and election law both require the Liberal Democrats' presence.

DEREK YOUNG  
Scottish Liberal Democrat prospective parliamentary candidate for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley  
Ayr

Sir: It is disturbing that the chairman of the Conservative Party appears fundamentally to misunderstand the nature of the British general election ("Major sets terms for TV debate", 17 March).

Brian Mawhinney says that the purpose of any televised pre-election debate (between leaders of two of the very many organisations putting up candidates) would be to facilitate "a choice of two possible prime ministers".

However, despite desperate attempts by the main parties to Americanise the election process, by using cynical market research techniques to recast their propaganda and by personalising the political fight, our election process is not presidential.

A well-chained radio debate with a panel drawn from all the parties fielding candidates would be a much better idea. It would obviate all visual presentational distractions and focus minds on nothing but the quality of argument.

Dr GARY SLAPPER  
The Law School  
Staffordshire University  
Stoke-on-Trent

Sir: It seems a shame that we should be considering a debate between two centrist politicians, rendered apolitical by Mandelson and Spin Doctor. We should have a TV debate



between "Chubby" Soames and the Beast of Bolsover ... You wouldn't need a Lib-Dem participant at all – they'd "win" the debate by default.

BARNEY HARRINGTON  
King's Langley, Hertfordshire

Sir: You report that Paddy Ashdown justifies the Liberal Democrats' constitutional deal with Labour as "giving the Scots and Welsh more say via their own assemblies" ("Ashdown defends Lib-Lab electoral pact", 10 March).

Until recently the Liberal Democrats supported an elected law-making parliament for both Wales and Scotland, with tax-varying powers. The "deal" which they have reached with Labour in Scotland via the Scottish Convention will allow such a parliament on the ballot paper in a referendum later this year.

Why then, have the Liberal Democrats compromised on an infinitely weaker proposal for Wales? The Welsh Assembly, which now the Liberal Democrats support, will have no primary law-making powers, no tax-varying powers, no tax-varying and no direct voice in Europe.

Only two weeks ago, at their conference in Conwy, Welsh Liberal Democrats claimed that a law-making parliament, supported by them since the days of Lloyd George, was the most favoured option of the Welsh electorate. To have sold out on a 100-year commitment to Wales for a minimalist degree of proportional representation is a rather sad end to a long and worthy Liberal tradition.

Your report notes very high pesticide levels in some home-

grown apples. This would indicate that the risk to farmers and farm workers in orchards from applying these hazardous chemicals is also a cause for concern.

Dr ANDREW WATTERSON  
Director, Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health  
Leicester

Sir: We are told that some apples and oranges have high levels of harmful organophosphate pesticides.

Surely the Government should advise us of which countries are supplying the harmful fruit and which varieties are affected. Then we could choose fruit from countries which use less pesticide.

Or is this another example of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food putting the interests of the food producers above consumer health?

C WELLS

Ruislip, Middlesex

Sir: There may well be no risk to anyone from BSE buried in open tips ... but there might. There may well be risk from the bovine incineration plants through the smoke and ash they produce ... but there might. Risks have been already taken and tips such as Rowley (report, 12 March) can only add to them by a relatively low amount.

Quite inadequate research has been carried out into the spread of BSE, into the doses needed to infect animals and into the levels present in bovine tissues. The levels

of infectivity originally claimed by Maff to be in the tissues were between 1,000 and 10,000 times lower than they turned out to be, and the tests used on most tissues were too insensitive. So not enough data is available to say if Rowley is a danger or not.

What we can say is that on average, in the UK, we have each eaten 50 meals of bovine products made from cattle infected with BSE and extensive research must now go ahead into methods of diagnosis and treatment for the people that have become infected.

The Medical Research Council has recently refused to fund research into the number of people in the population incubating the disease.

We have excellent scientists and should be using them.

DR STEPHEN DEALLER  
Microbiologist  
Burnley, Lancashire

of infectivity and the civilian population against the military activity of separatist groups operating in the enclave.

The need to defend national sovereignty and the civilian population against the military activity of separatist groups operating in the enclave.

The Angolan government has repeatedly called for a peaceful solution to the situation in Zaire and supports diplomatic efforts being made to end the crisis.

ANTONIO DA COSTA FERNANDES  
Ambassador  
Embassy of the Republic of Angola  
London SW1

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## campaign comment

# How the Tories can still win another five years

May the first is a good day for a general election. In many parts of the country, voters will be able to elect councillors at the same time as an MP. We could have a decent debate on what is needed in our schools, on our streets, in our communities, bringing together both the local and the national.

People want answers to how educational standards can be raised, crime controlled, gridlock tackled. It does need local as well as national action. I hope John Major does have a chance to debate with Tony Blair.

There are so many unanswered questions. How would Mr Blair avoid importing unemployment with Euro policies? How would he improve our schools when Labour councillors have often made them worse? How would he encourage more detection of crime when Labour has been tough on police authorities under their sway? He has ducked too many of these issues so far.

There are some Conservatives who believe that a stronger line on Europe is all that is needed to win the election comfortably. I do not believe that Europe is enough. It is one of the big issues on doorstep. It is the main issue amongst party faithful. But there are others.

Many of us want to be part of our continent, and to help it on the paths of peace and prosperity. We want Britain to argue vigorously around the tables of Europe for the right kind of Europe: for a Europe which works, for a Europe which can offer some hope of jobs as well as peace to our young people. That means changes to the agenda of the Union. It means not withdrawal, but using the veto, and the power of argument to deflect Europe from more government and more taxes, into a path of more jobs and fewer laws. Europe does not suffer from too many currencies or too few regulations. It suffers from too few jobs and too many regulations.

Britain should be saying that business needs more open markets in everything from aviation to telecommunications; that small business needs fewer social costs to employ more people; that economies facing mass unemployment need exchange rates and interest rates that help them get people back to work. We should say that Germany and France have fumbled in their compromise for the Stability Pact. It makes no sense to fine countries that are having trouble balancing their budgets. We should suggest a better way to make the western European peoples prosperous.

To win the election, Conservatives have to show how education, health, law and order will improve under another five years of Conservative administration. We have to explain how, in the last three years, we have followed the right economic policy, and how Labour's plans could damage that. We must show that the Conservative government is 18-years-experienced and energetic in office, not 18-years-old and tired.

We should not be warned off education by Labour complaining that if there are faults still

Europe is a key issue but health, education and crime must all be addressed if this government is to be re-elected, argues John Redwood

improve it. We believe in publishing the test results. We believe in more regular and better inspection. We believe in more parents having a choice of school. We believe in governors having more power to improve things. Gradual standards are rising. We need five more years to make much more progress.

It is the same with law and order. Crime has been falling for the last four years. It is still far too high. We need to see through reforms of sentencing and prisons that are now being put in place. We need to encourage and strengthen the police, freeing more men for detection and beat work. We need to raise the level of detection and clear up. We may need to break the monopoly of the Crown Prosecution Service, to bring more cases to court.

The electorate are very worried about health. Stephen Dorrell has stated that we should keep more of the smaller, local and older hospitals open. This is welcome. We need to see the results on the ground. However many more patients are being treated, however much the waiting lists come down, if the local hospital is closing it creates an impression of a NHS in retreat. That is an unfair reflection of all the extra money and activity. There is no need for it to happen.

A positive, alternative approach to Europe, offering Europe something better than Chancellor Kobl's vision of Maastricht misery, would help. So too will positive campaigning on the big issues that worry people in their daily lives. Insincere Mr Blair is offering nothing. He now accepts Conservative spending plans with the addition of a tax on fuel and water. He accepts much of our law and order programme. His education spokesman admits the problems but offers no solutions. In the days that remain, Conservatives must offer people a real choice: policies that can raise school standards, health quality, and living standards as well as a programme for a Europe that works.

The writer is Conservative MP for Wokingham.

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WHO PAYS?

# Mayday! Mayday! Can we really last six weeks?

As we enter the longest general election campaign in memory, Peter Popham wonders how the politicians will hold our attention

The longest election campaign in Britain this century poses one formidable challenge for all the parties: how to conduct it without driving all but the most train-spotters of political anoraks into mental hibernation.

Yesterday's announcement by the Prime Minister, though long expected, bad the usual galvanising effect of such events. At Smith Square and Millbank Tower, the activity was frenetic; at Westminster, members began sorting through their files, mapping out their movements and appearances, getting ready to take their shows on the road. Even though a 1 May election had been regarded as inevitable for weeks, official confirmation transformed the mood. The news yesterday that John Major was taking his soapbox back to Luton, where on 28 March five years ago it made its first appearance in his campaign, caused a frisson of anticipation. Battle had been joined.

Six weeks on, however, we will be sick of the sight of that damn box. Already we've had more than enough weeping lions and Siamese Majors, joined at the head, to last us a good long while. Six weeks from now, one more cheesy Blair grin, one more blast of sub-Churchillian national heroics, one more character slur, will turn us homicidal. One more gloomy, doomy scenario of Britain bankrupted and humiliated by either the machinations of Labour's left or a Tory party terminally riven by sleaze and Euro-scepticism will send us off our collective trolleys.

Supposing the *apparatchiks* can see this - supposing that chinks of *normal daylight* can penetrate the chamber wallpapered with slogans where these people reside - why, then, have they allowed John Major to take this terrifying gamble with our patience?

One reason is simply that the Prime Minister had painted himself into a corner. As one

insider put it, "John Major didn't want to be the last person to turn news into propaganda than to turn propaganda into news, so in peace-time, outside a campaign, journalists are only interested in news stories, not argument. That's not true in an election campaign. Conservatives depend on the arguments. We have nothing to fear from a prolonged intellectual debate."

There is also a sense in which, though now officially under way, the war will remain phoney for the next fortnight. Until the House dissolves after Easter, MPs will remain locked into their Commons routines, and government business will unfold with a hysterical semblance of normality. Only once April Fools' Day is safely behind them will the MPs board their war horses and saily forth.

There is one other reason for a long campaign. Tory strategists hope that the more searching the examination to which Tony Blair must be subjected, the better the chance that wavers will decide that after all they do not like what they see. "A long election campaign will help to focus on the risks of Labour," one senior

MP said.

It is brave talk, which strives to turn to advantage the fact that neither party has many more trinkets left to pull out from under the counter. The phoney campaign has been under way for months now, ever since the autumn party conferences. The fireworks have all been exploded. The *Tattoed Lady* has done her stuff. All that is left to titillate her is the prospect of the bare-knuckle fist-fight.

Of course the sheer intensity of activity and excitement

within political circles over the next weeks will produce enough accidental effects to distract the rest of us from time to time. Looking back over 1992, one recalls the great Jennifer Ear controversy, the launching of the *Natural Law* Party with the slogan, "Worthy of Eric Cantona." Only a new seed will yield a new crop. Then there were the fatal blunders of the last phase of Labour's campaign, the launch of the *alternative budget* April Fools' Day rally in Sheffield.

Such reckless celebrations of supposed foregone conclusions will no doubt be studiously avoided this time around. Labour has run an extremely tight ship ever since Blair took over as leader nearly three years ago, but yesterday the word from Millbank was that it had got even tighter: to prevent contradictory messages getting out to feed a ravenous Tory press, all bids for interviews with Labour must now be channelled through the press office. Discipline will be even more rigorously imposed than before.

This is an acknowledgement that despite or even because of his party's continuing extraordinary lead in the opinion polls, the attention of the nation will be relentlessly on Tony Blair for the next six weeks. And this is for a very good reason: Tony, we hardly know you. We know everything we have pushed at us, from fish and chips to Christian socialism. But if John Major is like some slightly seedy, down-at-heel uncle whose tedious monologues one avoids at family gatherings, Blair is the prospective new son-in-law. We've experienced the handshake and seen the grin, we've grinned back through several sessions of inconsequential banter. But who really is this man who claims this role in our lives? Our acquaintance has barely begun.

It is a fair bet that Blair's minders are not going to make it easy for us. But for voters, trying to find out who the Labour leader really is will be the main task of the next six weeks. Perhaps one's fear that this will be a boring time is wildly misplaced.

## Life lies beyond the dry stone of Pevsner

I caught a trailer on the television the other day for a programme called *In Pevsner's Steps or On the Trail of Pevsner* or something like that, and my blood ran cold. My mind went back to the days when I lived on the edge of museum circles, and just for a moment I felt the chill draught of that strange world.

For those who don't know the name, Pevsner was Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, who masterminded a series of books called *The Buildings of England*, issued county by county. Each book lists all the buildings in the county which Pevsner thought of historical or artistic interest, and then lists details of the buildings. Nothing quite like it has been attempted anywhere else in the world, and perhaps only a man with a meticulous Germanic background would even attempt it.

The upshot is that if you land in an unfamiliar part of England, you can refer to Pevsner for a quick rundown on the facades in the high street or to see what churches, castles, houses or town halls are worth a visit.

I remember walking around many such churches with my first wife. Pevsner in hand, trying to educate myself on church architecture, and it never occurred to me at the time that what I was doing as a



Miles  
Pevsner

grown-up was what I had done as a child, but with trains. When I was about 10 I sat on the edge of the old GWR line between Wrexham and Chester, making notes in Ian Allan train-spotting guides which listed all engines by class, by weight, by date, by depot and, of course, by number. Pevsner is no different. Ian Allan was to trains as Pevsner was to buildings. No, as Pevsner was to churches, because if you roamed through Pevsner's guides you will find that most of his buildings are churches, and most of the details are endless.

variations on gargoyles, arches, windows, doorways, tombs, fountains, chancels ... It's architectural train-spotting, that's all it is.

The reason I dragged my first wife into this is that it was she who introduced me to this world. Her father was an architect, on whose shelves I saw Pevsner for the first time, and all the time I was married to her she worked in a museum. A museum is Pevsnerland. Everything is neatly docketed and labelled, sorted out and catalogued, acquired and accessioned, laid out in rows or put in reserve, that is not so? Well, up to a point, Lord Copper.

The fact is that behind the quiet facade of the display cases and uniformed wardens there is as much blood spilt as anywhere else in the human jungle.

Behind the doors marked PRIVATE or STAFF ONLY there are rivalries and vendettas, backstabbing and eye-gouging, which are all the more shocking for taking place in a museum. There are people who think they should be heads of department, there are acts of favouritism which breed

years of resentment, there are new directors bringing their protégés with them...

"One day I should like to write a TV comedy set behind the scenes at a museum," I said to my first wife, "bloodstains and all."

"They'd never believe you," she said. I think she may have been right.

Now, for the first time in ages, I have taken down my two remaining Pevsner volumes from the shelves and what strikes me as strange about them as I reread is how full of things they are and how empty of people. In Pevsnerland houses last, but people die.

An architect is a dead name but a church is a living thing. All the important people in Pevsner are dead already - the living people are merely owners who may or may not help Pevsner with his inquiries into the odd elongated two-light windows. As I said, it is a cold world. Somewhere else things are going on, somewhere behind a door marked PRIVATE is the world of flesh and blood, but in Pevsnerland everything is cold and made of stone. I am not entirely sorry to be out of it.

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## Don't let them tell you it doesn't matter who wins

The intelligentsia (or chartering classes, as the right-wing press prefers) has always had a tricky love-affair with Labour. The left-leaning denizens of Hampstead, and indeed every other well-heeled intellectual coterie in the land, have wailed and gnashed their teeth over the last 18 years, watching the Tory vandals asset-stripe society. How they have prayed (well, no, they don't pray) for the moment the heathen horde would be routed from the citadels of civilisation.

So, here we are. Now, at last the time has come. Major and his straggling band of warring warlords are about to be blown away. The trumpets of young Fortinbras are sounding at the gates. His fresh-faced, well-disciplined army, hungry for government, will make a bloodless and triumphant entry on to a stage littered with the dead and dying who have fallen not at an enemy's hands, but under one another's swords and poisoned chalice.

Where, then, are Labour's camp followers, the intelligentsia? Are the champagne socialists popping their corks? No. Wherever I go I find them infuriatingly grudging. They discounted Blair's triumph ages ago and now they affect a blasé indifference to the outcome of the election. "What's the point? Who cares? They're all the same."

They hate Blair: his smile and his hair, his churlishness, his fiscal and moral rectitude, his shameless writings in the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun*. They hate his clothes, and even his guitar. They hate his wife for her dumbing-down guest-editorship of the cookie-baking housewives' magazine *Prima*. They hate his children for looking too good and going to the wrong schools. I keep running into cognoscenti who claim that, through a friend of a friend, they know he has reverted to his father's Tory values: the aristocratic pull of Fettes is just too strong. They know Cherie's Catholicism is his true guiding light. They know he has sacrificed everything in a Faustian pact with Murdoch et al. If the Tory press are his friends, then he must be our enemy.

Then, over the next glass of frascati, they will recall the days of the Wilson government and how he, too, betrayed them. In 1964, early days of hope and glory, they embraced Labour in the salons, theatres, galleries and senior common rooms. What happened? Wilson backed the Vietnam war and disgusted them with his pragmatic lack of principle. At least, though, in 1964 they waited for Labour to be elected and before they turned disillusioned.

I find myself getting waspish and snappy with them. What do they mean? After 18 years, imagine the shock of a new government. Just watch the Pickford van turn up. No 10 like a tumbril, with ten chests to sweep away John's and Norma's goods and chattels. See each keen new Labour face pose for a moment on the threshold of a new ministry before plunging in to greet a civil service most of whom barely remember a change of government. Don't underestimate change for change's sake. And that is before we consider Labour's constitutional reforms: Scotland, the Lords and proportional representation.

That's not all. Let's start with the basics: how will the poorest people do? (Remember them?) If Labour's minimum wage is set even at a miserly £3.50 an hour, 4 million very poor workers will benefit – nearly 16 per cent of the



Polly Toynbee  
Commentator  
of the Year

The frascati crowd may have already written off a Blair government, but the poor (remember them?) will be better off under Labour

Blair

government,

but the poor

(remember

them?) will

be better off

under

Labour

the Red Book was just his little joke, a rubber Emotional cheese full of holes. Imagine Clarke's glee when Brown claimed himself to its every mendacious word.

So, where's the money coming from? At this point we leave the realms of what's on the record, of public pledges, of party manifestos. Instead we have to read their lips and trust that they are lying through their teeth. If you stop and think about it, it is much easier to believe they are lying than that they are telling the truth. After all, we all know that all politicians lie at election time, so what's new? The difference is that they used to lie by promising wildly extravagant spending delights we all knew were impossible. Now both parties lie the other way round, promising preposterously stringent spending that they cannot possibly stick to. Despite Brown's impressive feat up there, dangling from his crane, do you really believe he will destroy the NHS, education and social services in the next two years?

Everyone is busy second-guessing what Brown's clever money-raising wheezes might be: £3bn by stopping mortgage interest tax relief, £3bn on the married couples' allowance, £2bn by making self-employed pay the same National Insurance as the rest, £5bn by taking tax exemptions off pensions. We could save £1.6bn on the planned 222 new Eurofighters, whose contracts we have not yet quite signed. Blair has sworn to stick to present defence spending but do you really, really believe him?

Oh I see, say the cynics wearily, are you saying Vote Labour. Because they're lying? Well, yes. I find it is easier to believe they are lying than that they are telling the truth. If Gordon Brown is not Harry Houdini, if he doesn't have tricks for breaking out of his self-imposed chains, then as Chancellor he'll be dead in his bag before long.

workforce. If Labour raised it later to £4, then over 23 per cent of the workforce would benefit – 6 million poor people. Is it just because this policy has been knocking around for so long that people seem bored by it?

What have 18 years of Tory government done to the poor? Tripled their numbers, three times more people now live on incomes below half national average earnings. Many more have become actually poorer, not just relatively poorer: while average incomes under the Tories rose a feel-good 33 per cent, the disposable incomes of the poorest 10th fell by 13 per cent. The gap between the richest 10th and the 10th poorest was at its lowest this century under the last Labour government, and now it is at its highest for at least 100 years. Those are some of the worst scars of the Tory years. Do the cynics really believe that Labour will not improve these figures?

Well, ask the cynics, how exactly are Labour going to do that? Show us the colour of their money. Gordon Brown has bound himself in iron chains and locks, has put himself into a canvas bag and is hanging upside down from a crane to show how firmly he will stick to existing spending plans for the next two years. What is he, Houdini? According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, the spending plans for every department are a calamity – with health and higher education the worst sufferers, cut more deeply than ever before. Kenneth Clarke never meant to stick to those figures.

But even if she had, we have *Tribune*'s report, less than wholeheartedly dismissed, that the editor of *The Times*, Peter Stothard, had Thatcher in mind when he quoted a very senior Conservative along those lines: "We have the explicit word of the journalist, Thatcher disciple and Blair convert Paul Johnson that that is what she thinks. I am now told that at two private dinners, one in New York for Nancy Reagan and another recently for a distinguished statesman in London, she said something pretty similar. This is beginning to look anything but a chance of the tongue."

So why should all this matter? First a gigantic health warning: Blair has never been ashamed about paying tribute to the big economic changes Thatcher made: including trade union reform which Labour had tried and failed to do a decade earlier, and privatisation, which it had never even dreamt of. But he has never disguised his view that she failed to see the price the country was paying in the social decay, poverty and hopelessness suffered by those whom Major admitted on Saturday were the "have-nots". Blair has never shared Lady Thatcher's brand of tribalism, so clearly expressed when Peter Walker suggested to her who had not bought their council houses should be given them: "What will our people say if we give their peo-

ple their houses? She did not like the term 'one nation'. Blair lives and breathes it.

Rather unusually, both are interested in ideology. Both are, to co-opt a phrase of Tony Benn, teacher-politicians. Both wanted to eliminate old-style socialism. And in doing so she as well as he probably did a lot to save the Labour Party from itself. Blair among Labour politicians saw her strengths most clearly: when she fell in 1990 he actually thought the Tories had made an error by getting rid of her. And on Europe, the issue which Lady Thatcher presumably has most in mind and on which she has therefore covertly done him the greatest service, she appears correctly to have identified that he is not a seller-out. Which is understandable: the sceptical tone of Blair's article in *The Sun* yesterday, drawing coveted approval in the paper's editorial, locates him, roughly speaking, as mid-period Thatcher. (About the time when she negotiated the hugely

favourable British rebate at Fontainebleau and well before she lost her rag at Rome II.)

Even the pro-European in Blair recognises that some of the sceptics make of the EU are actually true.

It may also be that Thatcher recognises a potentially hegemonic figure when she sees one. David Willetts, one of the Major's chief theoreticians, told an audience in Bath last week that Blair was embracing the ideas of West European social democracy just when they were being abandoned in continental Europe. That has an elegant ring to it, but it is not quite right. Social Democrats in Germany, France, and elsewhere are now gripped by the Blair saga precisely because they believe he is answering the question they have failed to answer: how to be a successful party of the centre-left in non-corporatist, deregulatory, free-trading times. If Blair wins it will have as energising and modernising an effect on the European left as Thatcher did on the

free market right. He will have leap-frogged European social democracy.

Major's role as legatee, despite yesterday's endorsement, is more complicated. He is different from Thatcher. He has seriously attempted to make a fresh start in Europe. He genuinely wanted a "nation at ease with itself". He resisted turning the Gulf War into a party political issue before the 1992 election. And he is commendably resisting pressure to make immigration one now.

But Major is imprisoned by a past which he failed to escape when he took office. He never made, perhaps could not make, the big party conference speech

in 1990 which might have said: "We got many things right in the 1980s but we got a lot wrong too. This is a new government with a new approach." The price he pays is to have to defend the long 18-year record of this government, the bad with the good. He cannot pick and choose. Blair can.

And "time for a change" becomes all the more forceful an argument for his opponents when it is applied not just to the six years for which Major has been in office. That is one reason why it now looks as though Essex man Worcester woman – Ford Sierra owner – who went directly from Labour to Thatcher's Conservatives in 1979 have retraced their steps. Another is that Blair's transformation of Labour makes him look a leader like her and not a manager like Major. All of which she may realise when she pays him those compliments from time to time. She is an honest woman – will she be able to resist saying so publicly if and when Blair wins?

## Thatcher's spectre still haunts the feast

by Donald Macintyre



Blair has never been ashamed of paying tribute to the economic achievements of Thatcherism ... But Major must defend the whole 18 years, the bad with the good

## Voters are too insecure to feel good



Andreas Whittam Smith  
The old link between successful economic performance and the prospect of winning at the polls has ended

Whatever happened to the feel-good factor? It has been taken as gospel by politicians that if the country is prosperous and the voters' spending power is rising, as is the case, then the government that has brought this about will be re-elected. This is one reason why John Major has deferred calling the election until he is within weeks of the completion of his five-year term. He has wanted to give the maximum time for the economy to rebound from the last recession and to grow so that voters would feel even more cheerful and re-elect the Conservatives for reasons of prudence, if no other. Indeed the main objective of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Kenneth Clarke, has for some time been to create a backdrop to the election in which the economy is expanding (it is), unemployment has fallen substantially (it has), inflation is subdued (never more so) and house prices are buoyant (another tick).

The actual situation is not just that recovery from recession is complete but that the British economy is better placed than it has been for a long time. If you look more broadly than at the statistics for growth, inflation and personal income, you see that in infrastructure, in the education and flexibility of the workforce, in the skills of management, in efficiency of

public services, the United Kingdom has closed much of the gap with its international competitors. According to the Social Market Foundation, in a study published yesterday, the UK's economic decline relative to other European countries may have ended.

This is an achievement for Conservative management of the economy since 1979, and of historic importance. It does not rank with winning the Second World War, but it is high. Yet the opinion polls unanimously and unwaveringly indicate that the electorate is not yet ready to reward the present government out of office. No doubt there are many reasons, but what is undeniable is that people are feeling neither good about the economy nor grateful for its performance. Why should that be so?

Contrary to all expectations, a low-inflation economy turns out to be an uncomfortable experience. Throughout the great inflation of the Sixties, Seventies and early Eighties, stable prices were held out as a golden prospect where all the tensions associated with the rising prices, strikes and the like would be calmed. Savings would be encouraged and investment would flourish as the uncertainty caused by inflation vanished. Indeed industrial stoppages have virtually disappeared and savers are

doing exceptionally well. But in the event the means required both to reach low inflation and prevent its recurrence are brutal and the disciplines it imposes are unpleasant.

We find that governments

cannot easily raise their budget deficits above trend, because international investors demand a high rate of return on the debt of the country concerned and the exchange rate declines. As a result, either the axe is taken to public spending or services are privatised or contracted out. At the same time, an era of low inflation removes from business the old escape route of raising prices when costs get out of control. Instead business finds itself subject to sporadic price cutting, as newspapers and book publishers have discovered. Increased prices will not stick. Something has to give, and it is employment.

The fear of losing your job remains acute even though fewer people are claiming unemployment benefit. This insecurity pervades the ranks of management quite as much as it affects the factory floor or the warehouse or the vast open-plan offices full of men and women working at desk-top computers. Any industrial company, any high-street bank, any local authority, any government department, any charity, any educational establishment, any research laboratory, any

branch of the armed services can suddenly announce a restructuring that extinguishes hundreds of jobs. Job security has vanished, along with notions of life-time employment or working for 40 years at the same company and collecting a full pension. As well as this general fear, there is an extra concern for many people – will their sons and daughters find jobs? Before employers make long-serving staff redundant in some down-sizing process, they first stop recruiting.

The statistics for youth employment remain grim.

Whether the growing disparity between a few, highly paid executives and the rest is getting to people and affecting their political attitudes, it is impossible to say. What do the ordinary staff of National Westminster Bank, faced as they are with a series of job-cutting programmes, think about the activities of the dealers of NatWest Markets where the chief executive, Martin Owen, who has presided over a £90m dealing loss, has agreed to forgo £200,000 of a £300,000 bonus as "an act of leadership". Apart from Mr Owen, a further handful of senior executives at NatWest Markets will together face a staggering £8m of bonus payments.

If declining unemployment figures have masked a loss of job security, rising house prices

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# business & city

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## Election campaign to unsteady markets

Diane Coyle  
Economics Editor

The financial markets reacted in time-honoured fashion to the prospect of an election campaign by sending the pound, gilts and share prices tumbling yesterday.

"It was a bit of a knee-jerk reaction," said Brynwyn Curtis, an economist at City investment bank Nomura. But she warned that the next six weeks would bring more volatility.

Sterling lost more than three

pfennigs against the Deutschmark, falling to its lowest level for six weeks, but also fell two cents against a weaker dollar, it ended at DM2.6840 and \$1.5875.

The FTSE 100 index closed down nearly 51 points at 4,373.5. Its fall was exaggerated by more than 22 points because of the unusually large number of share prices excluding dividends from yesterday as their payment date approached. Long-term gilts ended nearly a point lower.

A weak start on Wall Street also helped propel shares in London lower. The Dow Jones index was down 55 points at 6,880.70 by mid-morning.

In a remarkable contrast to

the City's traditional attitude to the party, most analysts reckon New Labour can be trusted. "Over the years there has been a feeling that Labour has become a lot more user-friendly as far as the City is concerned," said Neil MacKinnon, chief economist at Citibank.

"There is just a residual fear

about what a Labour government might do," said Gerard Lyons at DKB. But he predicted that any narrowing in the party's poll lead would fuel currency jitters because investors expect higher interest rates and a tougher budget if Labour beats the Conservatives.

The wave of important economic data due this week also contributed to yesterday's nerves. Figures due today for government borrowing in February are expected to be favourable thanks to the strong

economy, although any sign of an end-of-year surge in public spending could hit gilts.

Figures due later in the week on unemployment, earnings, retail prices, retail sales and industrial trends will be closely scrutinised for any signs of unsustainably fast growth or inflationary pressure.

House prices have continued to rise, according to a survey from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors yesterday. It said a north-south divide was re-emerging, with a short-

age of properties inflating prices in the south.

"Nowhere is the north-south contrast sharper than in London and its environs where City bonuses – of a magnitude last seen in the 1980s – are helping to inflate prices in sought-after areas," the report said.

Although no analysts expect the Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, to take the last pre-election opportunity to raise borrowing costs, after his 10 April meeting with the Governor of the Bank of England, this

week's figures could affect the chance of a move straight after the 1 May election.

The assumption is that Gordon Brown would take Bank of England advice to increase interest rates in order to establish his credibility. Labour is not expected to unveil any nasty surprises on economic policy,

said Mr Lyons.

Most of the big international banks and finance houses based in the City see the election campaign as a little local difficulty.

Some currency experts predicted a more difficult ride for the pound, however, because of evidence that the German economy has turned the corner.

Greater optimism about the outlook for the Continent's traditional economic powerhouse contributed to the Deutschmark's strength yesterday despite continuing uncertainty about prospects for EMO. Figures due this week are expected to show improved business confidence and retail sales.

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## Pearson to pump £150m into 'FT'

Patrick Tooher

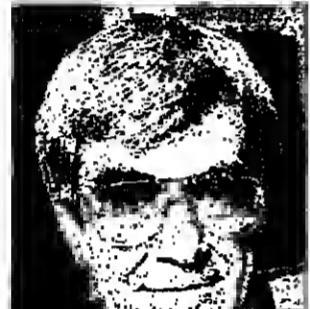
Pearson, the media and leisure conglomerate under new management yesterday unveiled plans to spend up to £150m on its flagship *Financial Times* newspaper over the next five years as it reported sharply lower profits due to the recent discovery of improper accounting at its Penguin book publishing subsidiary in the US.

Richard Lambert, currently the longest serving editor on Fleet Street, is moving to New York for a year from July to oversee editorial developments for the *Financial Times* in the US. Andrew Gowers, deputy editor, becomes acting editor.

There was disappointment in the City yesterday, however, that Marjorie Scardino, chief executive, did not unveil the widely expected restructuring of Pearson and the company's shares closed 17.5p down at 756.5p.

"It's going to be an evolution, not a revolution around here," she said. "This may sound like motherhood and apple pie but ... we are going to act like a group not like an investment portfolio."

"Whatever else we do we are going to work hard to improve the financial performance of this group," she continued. "As time goes on we may change the business we're in, too, as we work



Richard Lambert: Moving to New York from July

toward being the first in a few important markets. But we won't be selling things just to be tidy."

Ms Scardino was speaking after Pearson posted an 8 per cent increase in 1996 pre-tax profits before exceptional items to £281m. But operating profits including one-off items fell from £260m to £181m following a £100m charge taken against Penguin.

The problems at Penguin were uncovered in January and relate to unauthorised discounts given by a middle-ranking back office employee, Christina Galatzo, to customers in return for early payments.

John Makinson, finance director, said Pearson believed the

irregularities were the work of "one rogue employee", adding there was no firm evidence of collusion. Her superior had been suspended as a precaution pending the outcome of an investigation by accountants Price Waterhouse.

The *FT* is targeting the US as part of plans to invest up to £100m over the next five years to increase the paper's circulation overseas. A further £50m could be spent on promoting the *FT* and on enhancing production in other Pearson information companies, many of which carry the *FT* brand.

"We aim to achieve heroic circulation and heroic profit," said Ms Scardino.

North America accounts for only 35,000 of total daily *FT* sales overseas of 130,000. Total circulation for the paper, including the UK, is about 300,000.

Analysts welcomed Ms Scardino's decision to focus on the *FT*. "She's going back to what she knows, it's something she understands," one broker said. Ms Scardino ran *The Economist*, 50 per cent-owned by Pearson, before becoming chief executive.

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of *Neighbours*, was about to be sold to a £500m management buy-out team led by Greg Dyke.

She declined to identify Pearson's activities, raising speculation that Lazard's, the 50 per

cent-owned merchant bank, or even Madame Tussauds, the waxworks tourist attraction, may be up for sale. However, Ms Scardino confirmed recent reports in *The Independent* that

residual stakes in pay-TV broad-

casters BSkyB and SES, the Luxembourg-based Astra satellite owner, were up for sale.

Pressure for root-and-branch

change at Pearson has increased

since the disastrous £313m acquisition in 1994 of Mind-scape, the US computer software developer, where losses last year reached £45m.

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Roger Luard: £250,000 bonus when deal is done

BBC has taken a direct equity stake in a quoted company. Mr Luard plans to exercise options granted at 92p over 600,000 shares and sell these, together with over 305,000 shares he already holds. Last night shares in Flextech closed down 21p lower at 751p.

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## Luard in line for £6m windfall as Flextech signs BBC deal

Patrick Tooher

Roger Luard, chief executive of Flextech, was yesterday in line to net more than £6m from the sale of shares and the exercise of options as the satellite and cable broadcaster announced details of its pay-TV joint venture with the BBC. He will also receive a £250,000 bonus on completion of the BBC deal.

BBC Worldwide, the BBC's commercial arm, stands to gain income of more than £600m from the launch of up to eight pay-television channels in Britain and abroad within a few years, according to TCI, Flextech's US parent.

The deal with Flextech to develop the subscription channels marks the BBC's most significant step in commercial broadcasting.

But deputy director general Bob Phillips, chairman of BBC Worldwide, insisted there was no risk to licence payers' money and that commercial advertising would not be associated with the BBC brand.

"I want to make it quite clear that where programmes are funded by the licence fee, they will always, always be seen first on BBC1 or BBC2," he said.

The deal involves the creation of two joint ventures to combine the BBC's archive, scheduling

and production skills with Flextech's funds and multi-channel TV management and marketing knowledge. The vast majority of the programmes will be repeats, though some joint programme production is envisaged at a later stage.

The main deal will be to develop and launch mainly digital new pay-television channels in Britain. The second involves buying out and developing in analogue, and later in digital format, Flextech and BBC Worldwide will take a 50 per cent stake in the two ventures for up to 30 years. The service will be rolled out later this year.

Flextech is contributing £22m

of equity and can make £118m in credit facilities available.

Flextech, which also reported virtually unchanged pre-tax losses before exceptional credits for 1996 of £16.8m, is buying out pay-TV channels UK Gold and UK Living by issuing 35 million shares to its owners, media groups Pearson, America's Cox Communications, and BBC Worldwide.

The deal is worth about £270m and values UK Gold at about £120m and UK Living at £104m.

In return, Cox, Pearson and BBC Worldwide will take a 15.3, 5.6 and 3.5 per cent stakes respectively in Flextech. It is believed to be the first time the

irregularities were the work of "one rogue employee", adding there was no firm evidence of collusion. Her superior had been suspended as a precaution pending the outcome of an investigation by accountants Price Waterhouse.

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COMMENT

## Sanguine markets must look again at Labour

The challenge for the financial markets during the six-week slog to polling day may be to stay awake as much as anything else. A Labour victory has been so heavily discounted and the phoney election campaign has been running for so long that it will take more than the spice of John vs Tony, live and in debate, to prevent eyelids closing on the dealing desks.

Nevertheless, Mr Major has clearly determined that the long haul - 45 days at the hustings, the longest election campaign this century - is the best route to staying in power. That's time enough to expose Labour's financial illiteracy and fiscal irresponsibility while allowing a steady flow of good economic news to filter through.

The initial reaction from the markets might suggest that his strategy has got off to a good start - the pound down against the Deutschmark and dollar, gils off half a point and the Footsie tumbling by more than 50 points as the prospect of Tony Blair's first cabinet looms large. Like most knee jerk reactions, however, this one may well prove wrong.

Adjusting for the number of stocks going ex-dividend, the response from the equity markets to the naming of election day was less marked than that from the foreign exchanges. In the event that Labour does form the next government, it ought to be the other way around.

Gordon Brown has hung on for so long about fiscal rectitude, balanced budgets,

low inflation and the need to cost every spending pledge, that it is difficult to get a cigarette paper in between the two main parties on macro-economic policy. If an incoming Labour government does find itself confronted with a sterling crisis, it is more likely to be about how to control sterling's rise than prevent it from falling through the floor.

The outlook for the corporate sector is much less promising. Labour's pledge not to raise either the basic or high rates of tax looks ominous. The obvious target now that these avenue has been closed off must be companies, since neither companies nor the pension funds that provide their capital possess votes.

So far the only tax-raising pledge is the windfall levy on the privatised utilities. But will a Labour government be able to resist fiddling with corporation tax? And will a Labour government be able to resist further restricting, perhaps even abolishing, the tax credits that exempt funds enjoy on dividends?

If the latter were to happen then it would take a 10 per cent correction on the equity markets to maintain current yields. The markets are perhaps being more sanguine about the prospect of a Labour win than they ought to be.

Flextech or the BBC - who's got the better part of yesterday's deal to com-

mercialise the BBC's output of programming? Flextech puts up all the money but the BBC provides all the programming. The question is which is the more valuable? For choice, the BBC would plainly have wanted to do the whole thing itself, and but for the idiom of policy makers when they last rewrote the charter, it would be able to. As it is the BBC is prevented from borrowing anything or putting up any part of the licence fee as risk capital.

In order to commercialise its product and enter the fast growing subscription TV market, then, the BBC has to rely on external sources of capital; some part of its birthright has to be ceded, and quite a birthright it is too. The Flextech joint venture gets first call for digital subscription TV on all new programming produced by the BBC as well as its vast archive. This is something that over the years has been paid for by the British public out of the licence fee and its value is pretty much incalculable. All that we do know is that it must be worth a very large sum of money.

What this deal with Flextech means is that half of any money earned from the BBC's programming via subscription TV will in future go to an outside party. Flextech's input is its marketing acumen (which given that the company has never made a profit must for the time being be viewed as of questionable quality) and up to £130m of equity and debt. For many of us that might seem like a rather small price

to pay for all those billions of pounds worth of licence fee investment.

Both the BBC and Flextech, moreover, believe the venture will prove highly lucrative. For all we know the licence fee may by then be a dim and distant memory by the time this agreement is up for renewal thirty years from now and it will all be subscription TV and video on demand. In those circumstances the deal with Flextech will look like even more of a giveaway.

The upshot is that to view this deal as the BBC getting half of something for nothing is probably the wrong way of looking at it. A better way would be to say that the BBC is, in fact, giving away a highly valuable commodity for next to nothing. But if this is what is happening here, it is because the poor old BBC doesn't have any option. In the circumstances it has probably done as good a deal as it could have hoped for.

Shortly before Marjorie Scardino took charge at Pearson she told a colleague, in no uncertain terms, that things needed shaking up at this sleepy old media conglomerate. She summed up her strategy by quoting her compatriot, General Douglas MacArthur: have a good plan, execute it violently, and do it today.

Just 49 days into her new job, and Ms Scardino seems to altered tack a bit. Evolution, not revolution, she insists will be her guiding principle in the long campaign to

improve Pearson's lot. This is much more in tune with the old way at Pearson and some in the City will no doubt be disappointed by it. But there may be something in it. Whether investors are prepared to give her the time she needs for the evolutionary approach to work remains to be seen.

The £150m investment in the *FT* plainly makes sense. The pink un's strong brand name is an obviously under-exploited asset, particularly overseas and especially in the US, where it ought to be selling far more than the 35,000 copies it shifts at the moment. The *FT* very much falls into the category of 'old media' but at least it is a business Ms Scardino and the rest of the Pearson board understand. The same can't be said of *MindScape*.

In any case her plan to imitate Gen MacArthur may be more than just empty rhetoric. Ms Scardino won't specify which businesses she plans to sell in her drive for more focus, but it is clear she is looking at companies where Pearson does not have a controlling stake. This would include BskyB, where Pearson still has a 4.3 per cent stake, and SES, the six per cent-owned Astra satellite group. But it might also take in Lazard, a previously sacrosanct investment.

These three disposals could raise up to £1bn for Pearson - enough to buy Ms Scardino the time she needs to answer her critics. Until then the City should defer judgement.

## Forsyth acquitted of Polly Peck cash handling charges

Graham Ball

Elizabeth Forsyth, jailed for five years for handling cash allegedly stolen by her boss, Asil Nadir, walked free from the High Court yesterday.

Last April Mrs Forsyth, 60, was convicted on two counts of handling £400,000 that the prosecution claimed was stolen during the collapse of Asil Nadir's £1.5bn fruit to electronics business empire, Polly Peck International.

Mrs Forsyth, Mr Nadir's closest business associate in London, spent 10 months in jail and was released on bail at the start of her appeal in January.

Yesterday after her conviction was quashed and she was awarded costs estimated at more than £1m, she said: "This is a blow to my head for seven years now. I believe the Serious Fraud Office tried to ruin me."

Her acquittal joins a list of embarrassing setbacks in court for the Serious Fraud Office that include Maxwell, Guinness IV, Brent Walker, Blue Arrow and the notorious Roger Levitt case. In defence of its record, the SFO claims that of a total of 349 defendants 219 had been convicted and that at least one defendant, usually the principal



Asil Nadir: Ready to return to UK for a judicial inquiry'

offender, was convicted in 75 per cent of the cases brought.

Mr Nadir was in defiant mood yesterday when he heard of his former colleague's legal victory. Speaking from his office in the Turkish half of Nicosia in Cyprus, he said: "I am delighted at the news. Now all that is required is for a judicial inquiry into the handling of this whole matter and I'll be back."

Mrs Forsyth plans a short family holiday in Scotland. But yesterday within 30 minutes of the judgment she had phoned Mr Nadir in Nicosia, northern Cyprus, to relay her good news. "He was delighted on my behalf and I expect to go out to visit him on a business trip within the next month or so," she said.

"I believe Mr Nadir will ultimately be vindicated and that investors in Polly Peck will be properly compensated."

However, the appeal court

found that the judge in Mrs Forsyth's original prosecution, Mr Justice Tucker, had misdirected the jury.

At the appeal court yesterday Lord Justice Beldam, sitting with Mrs Justice Bracewell and Mr Justice Mance, took just 10 minutes to deliver the delayed verdict, although the written account of their deliberations ran to 50 pages.

Outside the court Mrs Forsyth, who has been supported by her 90-year-old mother and son Ian McAlpine said: "I hope the SFO offers compensation for 10 months' wrongful imprisonment. If they don't I shall take legal advice as to how to secure appropriate compensation. My conviction was not quashed on technical grounds, the appeal judges clearly thought that this was a scapegoat prosecution."

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Delighted: Elizabeth Forsyth yesterday after a court overturned her convictions. She said she hoped the SFO would compensate her for 10 months' wrongful imprisonment

## IN BRIEF

• Hammerson said commercial property market conditions continued to improve last year despite a disappointing rise in the company's net asset value during 1996 from 376p to 388p, right at the bottom of analysts' expectations. Full-year figures were accompanied by details of an £845m development programme including refurbishments of London's Brent Cross shopping centre and Birmingham's Bull Ring. A final dividend of 7.5p made a full year total of 11.2p, up 5 per cent.

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• In a fresh hint that the US Federal Reserve might raise interest rates after its Open Market Committee meets next week, Robert Parry, president of the San Francisco Fed, said it must be ready to head off future inflation. Speaking in Germany, he said: "We must be ready in act to head off an increase in inflation before they show up in the inflation data."

• Sir Richard Sykes, chief executive of Glaxo Wellcome, has netted a paper profit of nearly £1.8m after exercising options over shares worth £4.4m at the current price. Sir Richard sold enough of the resulting 394,000 shares to meet the £2.6m cost of exercising the options and an associated capital gains tax bill of around £500,000. The deal increased his stake in the company by a net 108,476 shares to 331,551.

• Scottish Amicable Finance has received final bid offers from Abbey National, AMP Society and Prudential Corporation and will make a recommended proposal by the end of March.

• Britain's Cornhill Insurance, part of German insurer Allianz Group, announced 1996 profits down 16 per cent from the previous year's record level to £61.6m. Ray Frees, Cornhill's chief executive, said the figures were satisfactory in an extremely competitive market. For 1996 general insurance profits fell to £30m from £46.1m and life profits to £5.9m from £6.9m.

• TT Group's shares rose 13p to 348p after it announced annual pre-tax profits up 19.2 per cent to £53.5m from £44.9m last time. TT Group joint chief executives Sheridan Comonte and Michael Eke said the company's order book levels "give rise to optimism" for 1997. Earnings per share was 22.7p against 19.5p last time, and TT paid a final dividend of 4.79p, making 7.59p for the full year against 6.53p for 1995.

• Rexan's healthcare packaging arm has signed a global agreement to supply medical packaging and component products to Allegiance Healthcare Corporation. The agreement, which runs until 2003, represents approximately \$280m in sales and is the largest contract awarded for medical packaging. Rexan's healthcare packaging division has current sales of about £180m.

• ASW Holdings plunged to a £51.8m loss for the year to December 1996 against a profit of £13.8m last time. The steel company said it was dependent on the construction industry, which continued to be depressed. It passed the final dividend. ASW said it planned to continue to improve production efficiency and to complete the cost cutting started in the UK and France last autumn.

## Tyco secures ADT with \$5.6bn friendly offer

David Usborne  
New York

The bitter battle for control of ADT, the burglar-alarm company headed by British entrepreneur Michael Ascroft, appeared to have ended yesterday after the announcement of a \$5.6bn (£3.5bn) friendly offer from Tyco International, a maker of fire and safety systems.

The deal, already approved by the Tyco and ADT boards, is a blow to Western Resources, a Kansas-based utility giant that had been struggling since last year to make ground with its 3.5bn (£2.2bn) hostile bid.

Tyco, which makes a diversified range of products including packaging and medical goods, agreed to play the role of "white knight" by offering ADT shareholders \$2.9 a share - Dennis Kozlowski, will remain chairman after the merger. The Tyco name will

also be retained. Tyco is based in Exeter, New Hampshire and the US, jumped 15 per cent in early New York trading from a Friday close of 27.75.

The deal, which should be completed by 1 July, Tyco will end up owning 64 per cent of the shares of the new company while ADT shareholders will have 36 per cent. Among the latter may be thwarted Western Resources, which currently holds a 27 per cent stake in ADT. Western Resources had no comment yesterday.

The struggle over ADT started last summer when a takeover agreement was struck with Wayne Huizenga's fast-expanding Republic Industries. The deal collapsed when Republic's share price plunged.

Home security firms have become attractive targets because of the opportunities they offer to gain contact with householders.

The planned break-up of Lonrho into its constituent

## Lonrho share price sags on warning over sterling

Tim Stevenson  
City Editor

Lonrho became the latest victim of the strength of sterling yesterday, warning that the soaring pound would compound flagging precious metal prices to leave half-year profits as much as a third lower than last year. The mining to hotels group's shares tumbled 19.5p at one point before closing 12.5p lower at 145p.

The trading statement, which the company issued to slow its share price which had appreciated 36 per cent in the past three months, followed hot on the heels of speculation in the weekend press that Lonrho is having problems negotiating the sale of its Princess hotels chain to Saudi investor Prince Al Waleed.

The planned break-up of Lonrho into its constituent

parts has been dogged by delays including the abandonment of proposals to make a public offering of its Metropole and Princess hotel chains. It has declined to put a timetable on the final stage of Lonrho's dismemberment, the spin-off of its African trading operations to leave the company as a pure mining play.

Lonrho is one of the world's largest gold and platinum producers. It owns 41 per cent of Ghana's Asantib Goldfields, the world's eighth-largest gold producer, and has a majority stake in Western Platinum and Eastern Platinum, which together produce a tenth of the world's production.

Gold traded recently at \$351 an ounce, down 15 per cent from its recent high of \$415 in February 1996. Platinum slumped to as little as \$35.00 an ounce in February of this year.

That would imply a profit fall of about £19m from the £58m pre-tax profit in the same period a year ago. Lonrho reports its figures in late June.

Analysts took a sanguine view of the announcement. "We all know that bullion prices were low; really there shouldn't have been any surprise," said Ian Rennardson, an analyst with Crédit Lyonnais. "But the share price has run ahead of itself, and the company was getting concerned about expectations."

Gold is expected to end the year at £21m to about £16m.

## Murdoch buys Heritage Media

New York - Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation is spending \$1.35bn (£850m) to acquire Heritage Media, the Dallas, Texas-based specialist in in-store marketing and operator of several television and radio stations across the US. writes David Usborne.

News Corp has offered to acquire Heritage for stock valued at \$75.4m. A subsidiary of News Corp will be the buyer of Heritage and will pay the equivalent of \$30.50 for each of Heritage's 38.6 million outstanding shares.

In addition, News Corp has agreed to take on about \$600m in Heritage's outstanding debt. The acquisition is still subject to approval by Heritage shareholders and federal regulators.

## Affordable Healthcare

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## business

# English China Clays dives into £43m loss

Magnus Grimond

English China Clays, the world's biggest producer of kaolin, yesterday slashed its final dividend by more than 35 per cent and unveiled £95m of exceptional charges as it acknowledged strategic mistakes had been made in the past. The charges and the difficulties experienced by its customers in the paper industry plunged the group to a £42.9m loss for last year, against profits of £95.1m before.

Lawrence Urquhart, the chairman, described the year as one of "restructuring and renewal" for the company against the background of severe volume decline in the paper market and "the lowest point" in the turnaround of the specialty chemicals business. The cut in the final dividend from 11.25p to 7p, reduces the total by a quarter to 12.5p. "This annual rate of dividend represents a base from which the directors consider the company can generate

dividend growth in future", Mr Urquhart said.

The reduction was signalled at the time of the interim results in September, but the shares slid 8p to 207.5p yesterday. Nick Wilson, analyst at Kleinwort Benson, said he was expecting the dividend cut but thought it should have gone further. "Certainly down to 10p and you could have argued for lower than that." Meanwhile, the exceptional charges were higher than he was expecting. He has cut his forecast for the current year from £69m to £65m and warned that the group's future depended on a revival in the paper industry. "Until we see that, [management] haven't done enough to help themselves out... The shares will still drift lower until we can see signs of a recovery under way."

Of the exceptional costs, £84.9m relate to asset write-downs, mainly at Georgia Kaolin, a US paper minerals business acquired for its reserves at a cost of \$355m (£210m) in



Lawrence Urquhart: Reached 'lowest point' in the turnaround of the chemicals business

1990. The group is now writing off some \$100m of the \$250m carrying value of those assets and Dennis Rediker, who took over as ECC chief executive from Andrew Teare at the beginning of 1996, acknowledged yesterday that the group had overpaid for the business. Mr Rediker said "the majority" of the trading profit decline

from \$60.2m to \$30.8m in ECC's American and Pacific operations related to Georgia Kaolin. The division has been hit by a 2 to 3 per cent drop in prices, 2 per cent lower volumes and operating problems. The write-off had also been prompted by tighter UK accounting rules, he said.

Another £10.1m of the excep-

tions covered restructuring in the European minerals and North American chemicals operations to cover redundancies. Around 400 jobs, mostly in Cornwall, went last year. Mr Rediker said they were "on track" to accomplish the target set last autumn of achieving £30m of cost savings in the kaolin business "and we are looking for more."

## Airtours seals £168m Costa deal

Tom Stevenson  
City Editor

Airtours' already close relationship with its largest shareholder, Carnival Corporation, intensified yesterday after the two companies put the finishing touches to their first joint purchase, the £168m acquisition of Costa Crociere, Europe's leading passenger cruise operator.

Airtours' shares closed 11p higher at £10.09p after the deal, first announced last December.

was confirmed. The shares have more than doubled since last summer, partly on the back of strong trading figures but largely because of increasing speculation that Carnival, which holds 29.5 per cent of Airtours' shares, is poised to make a bid for the rest of the company. City gossip has put a price of more than £12 million on any successful bid.

Airtours and Carnival are paying £168m for Costa, £13m less than the price announced in December when Costa's Milan-traded shares were sus-

pended ahead of final negotiations with a syndicate that controls 5.9 per cent.

The cut reflects the strength of sterling so far this year, making Airtours one of the few beneficiaries of the soaring pound.

Having secured the agreement of the syndicate, including the Costa family itself speaking for 30.7 per cent of the shares, Airtours and Carnival are confident of reaching the 90 per cent acceptance level on which the acquisition depends.

The deal is also dependent on

EU regulatory approval. If successful, Airtours will secure Costa's eight cruise ships which spend the summers in the Mediterranean and northern Europe, before sailing to the Caribbean and South America for the winter season. Costa, based in Genoa, made profits before tax in 1995 of £16.8m on £352m turnover.

In 1995 about 900,000 cruises were taken in the Mediterranean and northern Europe out of a global total of 5.4 million.

## Wiseman buys Scottish Pride

Nigel Cope  
City Correspondent

Robert Wiseman Dairies has strengthened its position in the Scottish milk market with the acquisition of the milk interests of Scottish Pride, the dairy group which collapsed into receivership last month.

The deal gives Robert Wiseman 78 per cent of the Scottish milk market compared with its previous 52 per cent. However, the company has reached an agreement with the OFT which

will allow the deal to go through as long as it reveals its prices to the trading authorities.

The company is paying £4.8m to acquire a milk bottling plant at Rutherglen as well as five depots and the "Fresh n Lo" trademark of semi-skimmed milk.

The move safeguards 120 of Scottish Pride's remaining 607 workers. Around 140 were made redundant earlier this month. Robert Wiseman is not buying Scottish Pride's milk processing plant at Govan near

Glasgow because it has a modern plant of its own nearby.

Robert Wiseman is raising £1.2m in a placing and open offer at 17.2p to fund the deal. The additional money will be used to invest in the Scottish Pride businesses.

Blair Nimmo of receivers KPMG said he hoped there would be no further redundancies. The sale of the loss-making milk interests leaves the more robust cheese and UHT businesses to him. "There is a good degree of interest in

these businesses whereas with the milk side there were really no other buyers apart from Robert Wiseman."

The receivers were called in to Scottish Pride in February after trading losses and debts mounted.

Robert Wiseman Dairies also said yesterday that since its half-year results in November, weak bulk cream prices and intense competition had kept margins under pressure. However, it said it had increased sales to supermarket customers.



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THE INDEPENDENT

[50 من الأصل]



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## THE INVESTMENT COLUMN EDITED BY TOM STEVENSON

# Avis Europe sales drive pays off as punters pile in

Investors hoping for a piece of the £237m Avis Europe offer for sale have until Friday to get their applications in, but judging by demand to date they may be lucky to get a decent-sized allocation.

The institutional and international placing of the car rental group is looking well covered even before the retail offer gets into its stride. With registrations for the prospectus from small investors running above 100,000, it looks inevitable that applications will be scaled down.

The only consolation for investors is that even if the £1,000 minimum allocation is scaled back, they will still gain access to the Founders' Club, giving them up to four days' free car rental worth £85 if they hold onto their shares until 3 July.

With some contortion of the usual rules of investment, advisers argue that the perks raise the notional yield on the shares from 3.2 per cent to 11.5 per cent, assuming the price is fixed at the 117p mid-point of the indicated range.

The big question is whether Avis is worth all the fuss, even if it is Europe's biggest rental group. The few in the City not involved in the sale have questioned why it requires five investment banks led by Merrill Lynch and NatWest Securities and an international marketing effort to get such a relatively small offer away. Presumably Avis is keen not to repeat its previous experience of the stock market: when it floated in 1986, two-thirds of the offer was left with the underwriters and the price went to an immediate discount in first dealings.

There is no doubt the business has its risks. Operating profits halved to under £40m in 1993-94 after Avis got hit by a triple whammy. The recession came late to the car rental industry and in that year all the European economies turned down at once.

Then the group was hammered by an interruption of car supplies from a "long-term partner" in Germany, and lastly a little-known side-effect of the collapse of the Berlin Wall was a huge upsurge in car theft in the West, resulting in the mainly uninsured Avis losing around 1,000 cars a year at one stage.

There is no doubt this is a strong business, generating compound annual profits

growth of over 12 per cent over the past 16 years. But within that, there can be big swings linked to economic growth rates, while the industry is highly competitive, with Hertz also coming to the market and Europcar rumoured to be on the way. The lessons of three years ago also highlight the importance of special sales deals on cars to the equation.

Hammerson is doing the right things, even if transforming Britain's fifth-biggest property business is proving a frustratingly slow process. It has put in train a serious development programme that has already chalked up a number of successes, including the pre-leasing of Globe House, a landmark headquarters building overlooking the Thames at Temple, to BAT.

The £58-per-square foot,

20-year terms are well in excess of an estimated £30 break-even point, underlining the potential for a development portfolio in the books at cost, not likely value.

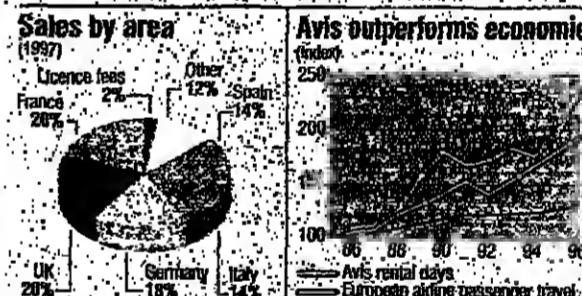
Elsewhere, ambitious plans include expanding the Brent Cross shopping centre to counter the perceived threat from a planned centre at White City in west London.

The property market is heading in the right direction, and Hammerson has a good exposure to its growth areas. With net assets forecast to be slightly less than the current share price at the end of the year, however, and the developments still a way from completion, much of the good news is already in the price.

## Avis Europe: At a glance

	1994	1995	1996	1997
Revenue (£m)	1,400	1,400	1,700	1,700
Operating profits (£m)	20.6	60.0	84.3	101
EPS (p)	1.42	1.75	2.17	2.19
Pre-tax profits (£m)	29.4	42.3	56.1	57.0

\*Based on mid-range of indicative offer price



## Slump sees Argos out of Footsie

It has not been a good couple of months for Argos. The highly regarded catalogue retailer came back to earth with a bump in January when it issued a profits warning caused by a slowdown in pre-Christmas sales. Later this month it will be relegated from the Footsie as a result of the share slump.

Investors were looking to yesterday's results for reassurance that the Argos bubble has not burst. The reassurance duly arrived, though it was couched in cautious terms by the resolutely downbeat chief executive Mike Smith.

His view is that retailers face a tough future with intense competition and value-con-

sious shoppers. The good news for Argos investors is that the company has built its reputation on value and is well placed to take advantage.

With profits 14 per cent higher at £141m Argos shaved its prices by 1 per cent in 1996 but still managed to increase margins by 0.4 percentage points thanks to better sales of higher margin ranges.

Costs also rose, due largely to higher paper prices and longer print runs of catalogues. Though first-half profits are unlikely to exceed last year's record half, it is the second half that matters.

Argos hopes to avoid market saturation by adding smaller Call & Collect stores

where customers order their goods for later collection. The move into Holland looks interesting though it will cost £5m this year. Argos still has £114m cash and though a £1bn buy is possible, the company says, the money may be returned to shareholders if a suitable target is not found.

Like-for-like sales growth of 7 per cent in current trading conceals double-digit growth in toys, electrical and jewellery, the three sectors which contributed to the sales slowdown pre-Christmas.

With analysts expecting profits of £160m the shares - up 9.5p to 648.5p yesterday - trade on a forward rating of 17. Still worth holding.

Wilson Bowden builds £41m profits

A bullish outlook on prospects pushed shares in the Wilson Bowden housebuilding company up by a sighting shot of the all-time high of 570p when it was hit in early 1994.

Shares in the company, which floated on the stock market 10 years ago, climbed 20p to 542.5p after David Wilson, chairman and chief executive, announced record profits and said: "The whole business is on a roll and reservations are some 30 per cent up on the same period last year. There may be a couple of slow weeks immediately before and after the election, but overall I expect a steady improvement."

The company anticipates that its house completions this year could be 15 per cent higher than the 2,500 achieved last year. Mr Wilson said the homes market was particularly strong in the south of England. He said: "There is also some evidence to suggest that the 'ripple effect' is starting to show through in the north of the country."

Last year's 39 per cent profit

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## business

# Slimmer governments under pressure to do more with less



Hamish McRae

Interestingly, the Netherlands and Ireland are now cited as examples to the rest of the EU:

Eire has become the European 'tiger' economy

while both parties are making cutting taxation a central point of their election campaign.

This raises the central question: what tools are available to help governments do more with less? Privatisation shifts responsibility away from government,

the state, privatisation. The chart, from the latest OECD Financial Market Trends, shows how the global momentum has been building through the 1990s. More money will be raised this year by privatisation, not just on the developed countries but also in the developing ones, than ever before in history: something like \$100bn.

Associated with privatisation has been another parallel phenomenon: outsourcing. Contracting out services has become one of the main ways in which developed countries have introduced market disciplines to public services. Trimming this is more difficult than tracking privatisation, but also in the developing ones, than ever before in history: something like \$100bn.

Several OECD countries have cut the size of their public sectors much more dramatically than the UK. Government outlays as a percentage of GDP peaked in the UK in 1976 at just over 48 per cent, while now they are 42 per cent, a six-point fall. But in the Netherlands the fall has been 10 points, from a peak of 60 per cent in 1983 to 50 per cent this year; and in Ireland it has been 13 points, from over 53 per cent, also in 1983, to under 40 per cent this year. Other countries which have made significant, though slightly smaller, cuts include Belgium and New Zealand.

Interestingly, both the Netherlands and Ireland are now cited as examples to the rest of the EU: people talk of the Netherlands as an example for Germany and France, while Eire has become the European 'tiger' economy. Of course there is a virtuous circle here: for rapidly growing economies see a fall in the share of public spending to GDP simply because the GDP is growing quickly. But the restraint of public spending has been substantial in both cases.

In the majority of countries, though, public spending has tended to rise, so anyone arguing that a sea-change has taken place in the perception of the appropriate size of the state's premature. Such a change may have happened – I happen to think it has – but the evidence is thin.

There is much more evidence of the durability of that other aspect of downsizing of

privatisation, and regulation of privatised services can be subcontracted to independent regulators, but what of the functions where responsibility is retained?

The OECD has published guidelines on how to identify best practices for evaluating whether such services should be contracted out, and how the process can be managed once the decision has been made. It selected eight points.

First, top management should use contracting out to re-evaluate why various tasks are carried out and the way they are done. In other words, one should not contract out the same job done in the same way but think through how the job can be done better.

Two, recognise that people matter: it is not just a financial and performance exercise but one where individual staff performance is crucial. So staff should be brought on board.

Three, specify service in terms of outputs, not inputs. You still beat politicians talking of the amount of money spent on a service rather than the quality of the service. The rhetoric ought to be the other way round: politicians ought to be proud when the public sector can obtain as good or a better service at a lower cost.

Four, monitor performance and foster co-operation. Contracting out an activity should not diminish the responsibility of the public sector to

make sure it is performed to the appropriate standard. So there needs to be a formal but non-confrontational relationship which includes a provision to pass across the contract to another supplier if it is taken away.

Five, make sure comparisons are valid. Very often, when a service is outsourced, there are changes to the way it is done. That may be desirable, for it is a good opportunity to rethink a service. But you need to compare before and after in a valid way, so that an improved or streamlined service is allowed for in any comparisons.

Six, in-house bids should be treated in the same way as outside ones, and if a contract is granted, performance monitored in the same way.

Seven, governments should foster competitive markets. That is a key to achieving the full benefit of contracting out: contracts have to be of the right size – not too small to fail to attract interest or so large that only a tiny band of suppliers could provide it.

And finally, governments need to acquire new skills to manage contracted-out services. It is a different job running an internal team from obtaining the best from an outside one.

It is a thought-provoking litany: in many ways self-evident, but not when you listen to the way many politicians still express themselves. And it matters. There may or may not be a sea-change taking place in the size of government, but there is a certainly a redefinition taking place in what government itself does, and what it gets outside contractors to do for it. Just as companies are learning new skills at managing a network of suppliers rather than a large in-house bureaucracy, so too are governments. This is happening the world over. And it will go on, as the pressure not for more government, but for better government, builds up.

# Football match to help orphans going home

## PEOPLE & BUSINESS



Glory days: Bob Latchford, the former Everton striker, in the club's 1970s kit, enamoured of David Styles

insurance company, already employs about 100 people, and is expecting to expand to 300. Mr Heseltine was accompanied by the Japanese ambassador to the UK, Mr Hiroaki Fujii.

In all smacks of a conciliation prize, however, when you consider that the Toyota plant if opened will employ around 3,000 people.

Still, we are in the run up to the general election. Now the race is off, "spoken communication specialists".

Christina Stuart, managing director of SpeakEasy training, has ranked politicians on their oratorical skills.

Ms Stuart puts Hezza himself in the category "The Clever Dick", along with Gordon Brown: "Gets so tied up in intricate detail and counter-argument that the message doesn't get across."

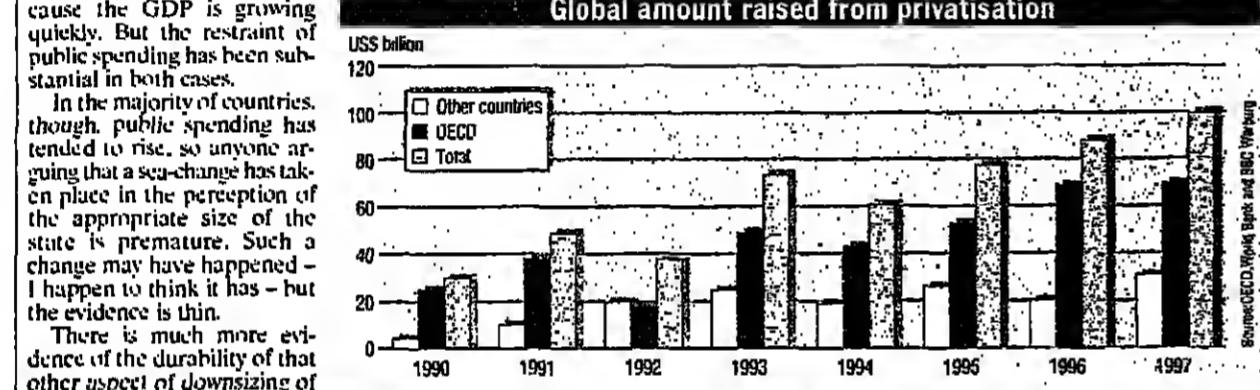
Then there is "The Joker": "Tries to come across as one of the lads, but the false jollity doesn't quite ring true" (Kenneth Clarke, Tony Blair).

Ms Smart goes on to define "The Crosspatch": "Gets het up, interrupts frequently and has been known to storm out of the studio (Clare Short, Dennis Skinner). Then there's "The Smoothie": "Has his speech of pat – but never quite looks the interviewer in the eye (John Redwood, Alan Clark)."

Last but not least is "The Passion Killer": "Totally lacking in charisma – appears not to feel particularly strongly about anything (John Major, Peter Lilley)."

It's been a tough week for the Scots. On Saturday they were given a drubbing in Paris courtesy of the French rugby team. Now it emerges that the holding company for The Scotsman, the flagship of the tartan press owned by the Barclay brothers, is dominated in England, horror of horrors, Celtic will be moving to Stamford Bridge next.

John Willcock



Foreign Exchange Rates									
Sterling		Dollar		D-Mark					
Country	Sterling	Spot	1 month	3 months	Spot	1 month	3 months	1 month	3 months
US	1.5672	10.8	23.25	20.00	0.8917	0.8917	0.8917	0.8917	0.8917
Canada	2.7148	61.77	170.65	170.72	29.26	82.80	82.80	82.80	82.80
Germany	5.2620	70.63	207.95	207.95	43.31	102.70	102.70	102.70	102.70
France	5.2620	70.63	207.95	207.95	43.31	102.70	102.70	102.70	102.70
Italy	3.6778	72.42	171.94	171.94	26.533	52.32	52.32	52.32	52.32
Japan	156.32	99.95	285.20	285.20	156.33	156.33	156.33	156.33	156.33
UK	13.853	24.20	75.45	14.08	11.12	36.50	36.50	36.50	36.50
Australia	1.5525	15.75	42.25	42.25	1.5525	15.75	15.75	15.75	15.75
Denmark	10.343	25.90	70.60	68.64	8.6324	29.37	29.37	29.37	29.37
Netherlands	3.0088	35.77	246.22	190.91	3.0088	37.15	37.15	37.15	37.15
Ireland	1.0188	15.77	42.25	42.25	1.0188	15.77	15.77	15.77	15.77
Spain	1.0172	20.50	70.60	68.64	1.0172	20.50	20.50	20.50	20.50
Sweden	2.7791	22.00	160.00	160.00	2.7791	22.00	22.00	22.00	22.00
Austria	1.9977	15.75	42.25	42.25	1.9977	15.75	15.75	15.75	15.75
Hong Kong	2.2933	67.26	184.12	172.49	2.2933	67.26	67.26	67.26	67.26
Malaysia	3.3527	0.9	0.4	0.4	2.4777	2.77	2.77	2.77	2.77
Singapore	3.5829	0.9	0.4	0.4	3.5829	2.77	2.77	2.77	2.77
Singapore	2.2769	0.9	0.4	0.4	3.5829	2.77	2.77	2.77	2.77

Other Spot Rates	Sterling	Dollar	Country	Sterling	Dollar
Argentina	1.5672	0.9368	Nigeria	1.0455	85.0000
Austria	15.8622	119.845	Oran	0.8917	0.8917
China	2.2769	1.2563	Portuguese	1.0188	1.0188
Egypt	3.3734	1.5654	Portugal	2.7007	170.70
Finland	8.0694	5.0185	Qatar	1.7775	1.7775
Greece	4.2346	2.66330	Denmark	1.4775	1.4775
India	56.9426	35.8761	Taiwan	1.7075	1.7075
Iceland	0.4822	0.3037	UAE	5.8302	36.740

Forward rates quoted high to low are at a discount: subtract from spot rate quoted low to high at a premium.

"Dollar rates quoted as reciprocals.

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Interest Rates									
UK		Germany		US		Japan			
Base	0.60%	Discount	2.50%	Prime	8.75%	Discount	0.50%	Bank	Belgium
France	0.60%	3.5%	4.5%	7.44	8.75%	4.82	6.0%	7.44	7.44
Germany	0.60%	3.5%	4.5%	7.44	8.75%	4.82	6.0%	7.44	7.44
Japan</									



## sport

# The flank forward Charvis proved the most serious of the losses to Wales because England won in the front five

Long before last Saturday morning – in fact as soon as the Welsh team was announced – I decided against having the double on France and Wales that I had proclaimed in a previous column. About France I was confident, but about Wales I had increasing doubts. The replacement of an injured Arwel Thomas by Jonathan Davies was, I thought, more than a fair exchange. But I did not think the side could survive the loss of Ieuan Evans, Scott Gibbs and, most of all, Colin Charvis.

Evans still has the knack of scoring tries, even at his advanced age, though he would have been hard put to it to cross the line once on Saturday; his replacement, Simon Hill, did not receive a single pass. Gibbs would have disrupted England's midfield more effectively than any-

one else and might have put some- thing together with Allan Ballantyne (who nevertheless had another good game despite Gibbs' absence).

But the loss of Charvis, the discovery of the season – even though he is not in the preliminary Lions party – was the most serious. It meant that Wales' forward thrust depended mainly on Scott Quinnell, and secondarily on Gareth Llewellyn. England would still have won, because they won in the front five, and Charvis is a flanker.

Throughout the season I have had doubts about Kevin Bowring's selection policy in this area. Now is as good a time as any to air them. To begin with, why is Craig Quinnell always the lock who comes on as a substitute three-quarters of the way through the second half? Why can

he not for once be given a full game as Llewellyn's partner?

Then there is the front row.

Garin Jenkins, though something of



ALAN WATKINS

a walking provocation, is still I think the superior of Jonathan Humphreys. The captaincy would in Humphreys' absence be assumed by Gibbs. David Young has made a commendable return to rugby union but, despite my prejudice in favour of former league players, John Davies looks better as a tight-head.

Indeed, front row forwards are the only former league players who do not return to the union game as better performers. This is because they have been compelled to spend their time in not scrummaging but instead in standing virtually upright while the scrum-half bounces the ball off the outside leg of the loose-head prop.

preference No 8s. The last two (of whom McIntosh came on as a substitute against England) are not Welsh at all but New Zealanders. However, they are better players than the sitting tenant, Williams.

There are also big holes on both wings. Evans cannot go on forever, even if he is fully fit, which unhappily he rarely is. The left wing position remains a difficult problem, as it has always tended to be in Wales. Dafydd James had a wretched game against Ireland, while Gareth Thomas – who, like James, is really a centre anyway – has fared little better, and on Saturday showed distressing signs in such a big chap of what the RAF used to call lack of moral fibre.

Nor is the No 6 possession at all satisfactory. Steve Williams, Hemi Taylor and Dale McIntosh are all by preference No 8s. The last two (of whom McIntosh came on as a substitute against England) are not Welsh at all but New Zealanders. However, they are better players than the sitting tenant, Williams.

He could scarcely do worse than he did as a full-back. It is not his fault. He is by nature and training a very fast wing, as quick, probably, as Tony Underwood. When Neil Jenkins went off, Bowring was lucky that Davies could take over the goal-kicking. He should also have had a proper full-back in position. Why is Justin Thomas out of favour? Why was Mike Rayer discarded as

metaphorically as he was?

It is not as if Bowring is overwhelmed by a profusion of talent. He has a nucleus of very good players: Jenkins, Bateman, Gibbs, Robert Howley, the Quinell brothers and Charvis. Scotland have fewer: Alan Tait, Ken Logan, Gregor Townsend and Rob Wainwright. Ireland have Jeremy Davidson.

I hope Jenkins's arm mends in

## France advance, England enhance

Chris Hewett looks at the rugby lessons of the Five Nations' Championship and suggests that Anglo-French domination is not all it seems

Three cheers for France, two and a half for England, varying degrees of sympathy for the persecuted Celts and a new national anthem for the Irish. Well, the "Soldier's Song" seems somehow inappropriate for a side who, having lost every half-decent player they possess to the Courage leagues, have now compounded their own catastrophe by surrendering the will to fight.

A superficial reading of the peaks and troughs of the last 10 weeks suggests that the 1997 Five Nations' Championship offered the definitive confirmation of European rugby's slide into institutionalised inequality. France and England, rich in resources and secure in structure, breathed in the rarefied air of the mountain tops while the second-class citizenry to the north and west laboured

in the foothills, confined to base camp by the fell wind of half-cock professionalism.

And it is undeniable that, taken at their worst, the Celtic underclass looked so far off the pace that the real big guns of world rugby – the All Blacks and the Springboks – would need the Hublot Telescope to trace them. Ireland's performances against England and Scotland were abject in the extreme while the Scots were unimaginably hopeless during the second half of their opening match with Wales, who, in turn, were naive in their own fixture with the Irish.

As a result, there is an overwhelming temptation to consign all three countries to the dustbin of rugby history, to advise them to give it all up as a bad job and concentrate on snooker, curling and Gaelic football instead. From now on, you may

think it's all about England and France. France and England and the supercharged, Super 12 superpowers from the super south. Super.

There is much to be said for this theory. Certainly, the French look good early bets for the 1999 World Cup for in achieving a fifth *Grand Chelem* without seven first-choice players – Alain Penaud, their majestic outside-half, lengthened the absented list to eight when he pulled out of the final with Scotland – they at last proved themselves capable of staring adversity in the face and keeping their cool rather than trying to knock its block off.

Jean-Claude Skrela, Pierre Villepreux and Jo Maso, three names from the pantheon of Gallic rugby, commanded sufficient respect to ensure iron discipline as well as will o' the wisp adventure and they deserve as much credit for that as for their prescience in unleashing Christophe Lamaison and Olivier Magne on an unsuspecting championship.

So far so good for the Two Division lobby. Hang on just a second, though. What have England got it anywhere near as right as the French? Does the impression of red rose supremacy over the beleaguered outposts of the British Isles have a firm a foothold in reality, or is it a mirage cast by a shower of impressive statistics?

Thanks to that old English standby, a juggernaut pack, Phil de Glanville's team gave short shrift to the Scots, Irish and Welsh. They scored 121 points and 14 tries in those three games while conceding 32 and two. A slaughter of the innocents in anyone's language.

Dig beneath the surface, though, and the clarity begins to blur. But for Paddy O'Brien's off-the-wall refereeing, England would have been big points down against the Scots before they had raised a sweat; but for early injuries to Eric Miller and Eric Elwood, the Irish might not have been quite so conciliatory in Dublin? No, you say? Well, that's precisely the sort of injury that France were forced to swallow as the series unfolded.

For all the talk of "interactive rugby" and "big steps forward", England are no nearer settling on their best half-back pairing than the rest of us. The

French, on the other hand,

think it's all about England and France. France and England and the supercharged, Super 12 superpowers from the super south. Super.

Those Francophones who

believe Abdel Benazzi and company simply got lucky in the last 20 minutes at Twickenham – surprise, surprise, Brian Moore, the English pitbull, is foremost among them – should consider this. Would England have come within a lion's roar of the title had they been denied the services of their entire three-quarter line, both first-choice half-backs, Jason Leonard, Martin Johnson and Lawrence Dallaglio? No, you say? Well, that's precisely the sort of injury that France were forced to swallow as the series unfolded.

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**A rare event**  
Mike Rowbottom sees an England cricket victory at Lord's, page 27

# SPORT

TUESDAY 18 MARCH 1997 • THE INDEPENDENT

**An unequal struggle**  
Chris Hewett gives his verdict on the Five Nations, page 26

## Hopkin next on Sunderland shopping list

### Football

Peter Reid, trying to keep Sunderland in the Premiership, made a £2.5m bid for Crystal Palace's goalscorer midfielder David Hopkin yesterday after securing the transfer of Chris Waddle from Bradford City for a mere £75,000.

As a boy Waddle used to support Sunderland at Roker Park, but now he will be intent on helping the club avoid a return in the First Division. Bradford, locked in their own relegation struggle, have signed Mike Newell on loan from Birmingham City for the rest of the season.

Reid approached his Crystal Palace counterpart, Steve Coppell, yesterday with an offer for Hopkin after the club's survival struggle was intensified by their 6-2 defeat at Chelsea on Sunday. Palace have already turned down an offer from Leeds for the players they signed from Chelsea for £700,000 two years ago, but Reid is willing to pay over the odds for Hopkin in this crisis.

Manchester City are close to completing the signing of the former Aston Villa striker, Dalian Atkinson, who has been with Fenerbahce in Turkey. The player is awaiting international clearance for the move.

The Scottish Football Association will hold a full inquiry into the confrontations between players during and after the match between Celtic and Rangers at Parkhead on Sunday. The SFA's chief executive,

Jim Farry, is waiting for the official report by the match referee, Hugh Dallas, before deciding what action to take.

Dallas, who sent off two players and booked another eight, will reveal the full extent of

flare-up which erupted at the final whistle after Rangers' 1-0 win, which all but seals their ninth title in a row.

The FA Cup giantkillers Huddersfield Town have been severely censured and warned about

their future conduct after being found guilty of misconduct at an FA hearing in Birmingham.

Hednesford, who reached the fourth round of the FA Cup this season, were also fined £10,000,

but the penalty has been sus-

pended for two years.

The charge arose out of irregularities in an application made to the Sports Grounds Initiative for a grant towards building a new stand at the GM Vauxhall Conference club's Cross Keys Park stadium.

The Football Association is to take no action over the crowd disturbances that marred the Bristol derby for the second time this season. Police arrest

had been exasperated by the photographer's actions on 24 June, 1994.

The photographer, who needed hospital treatment after being punched in the face by the player in the incident, said he was merely doing his job.



Game plan: Kenny Dalglish outlines the size of Newcastle's task in Monaco yesterday

Lamaison pleads not guilty to charge

### Rugby Union

CHRIS HEWETT

Scotland are pushing ahead with

their attempt to call Christophe

Lamaison to account for his

damaging shoulder-charge on

Craig Chalmers during Saturday's Five Nations international in Paris, but the French centre

is on such a roll that when he de-

fends himself at this week's dis-

ciplinary meeting, the tribunal

will probably end up awarding

him compensation for the slight

on his character.

Lamaison, the Brive goal-

kicker who made a decisive

contribution to his country's

Grand Slam, was cited by the

Scots in the latest outbreak of

trial by video. Footage showed

him clattering a fraction late

into Chalmers' Scotland's

outside-half, who left the field

on a stretcher before collapsing

in the changing room and was

diagnosed as suffering from

severe concussion.

"I don't have the impression

that I fouled him," said Lamaison yesterday and he won support from Jo Maso, one of the

French coaches, who insisted:

"It was just one of those injuries

you get in rugby. Lamaison did

catch him late, but he was going

very fast into the tackle."

The French have proved

more ready than anyone to discipline

their own players of late – Olivier Merle, Richard Dourthe, Francis Journaire and

Christian Califano have all re-

ceived bans in recent years – but

they look ready to fight their

man's corner this time.

Meanwhile, leading Welsh

officials moved quickly yesterday to distance themselves from

reports that they would make a

temporary home for themselves

at Twickenham next season. As

demolition work continued at

Cardiff Arms Park in preparation

for a new £14m stadium,

Glamorgan Griffiths, the Welsh

Rugby Union treasurer, identified

Wembley as the most obvi-

ous stand-in venue for the

internationals with New Zea-

land, Scotland and France.

"We've considered Wicke-

ham, but we wouldn't be able to

play one of our Five Nations

matches there next season be-

cause it clashes with an England date," Griffiths said. "We've

looked at a number of possibil-

ities, including Old Trafford

and Villa Park, but we have to

take into account the interests

of our supporters and it is so easy

to get to London from Wales.

Wembley is the likely choice."

Photograph: Alisport

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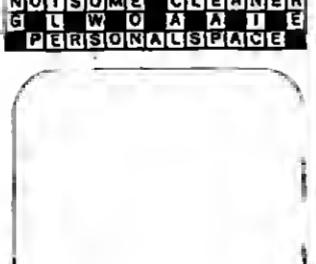
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### THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3249. Tuesday 18 March

By Aled

Munday's Solution



## Jockeys arrested for Hong Kong race-fixing

### Racing

STEPHEN VINES  
reports from Hong Kong

Hong Kong's all-powerful Independent Commission Against Corruption has launched the colony's biggest ever crackdown on race-fixing and illegal gambling. In the last two days 37 arrests have been made of jockeys, trainers, racing officials and illegal bookmakers.

Racing is extremely big business here. Last year the Hong Kong Jockey Club, the sole legal outlet for gambling in the colony, took in bets totalling tens of millions of pounds for a single race. When the Shanghai Syndicate was busted it was revealed that more than £1.5m was spent fixing single races. As more than a decade has elapsed it is likely that the sums involved today are far higher.

The swoop began while racing was underway on Sunday evening, with the jockey's room at the lavish Sha Tin racecourse being cordoned off. Trainers were escorted from the track while others were picked up in their homes. Further raids on suspected illegal betting premises were made yesterday as more people were picked up for questioning.

The ICAC will not comment on the nature of the allegations, however it is believed that offences include outright race-fixing, with jockeys being bribed for getting their horses to underperform to providing illicit tips to illegal bookmakers.

The last major racing scandal

broke open the so called Shanghai Syndicate which controlled up to 100 horses as well as a number of trainers and jockeys. The syndicate's boss, the textile tycoon Yang Yuan-joong, was fined £40,000 and given a two-year suspended jail sentence in the grounds that he was suffering from terminal cancer. Mr Yang is still alive and well.

Stakes at Hong Kong's two racetracks are traditionally very high, major events draw in bets totalling tens of millions of pounds for a single race. When the Shanghai Syndicate was busted it was revealed that more than £1.5m was spent fixing single races. As more than a decade has elapsed it is likely that the sums involved today are far higher.

The Hong Kong Jockey Club, which has recently relaunched the word "royal" from its name, has been a bastion of the colony's establishment since horse racing began there in 1841, the year in which the Union flag was raised on Hong Kong soil. Donations from the Jockey Club provide the biggest non-governmental source of funds for educational institutions, medical facilities and welfare organisations.

The club's stewards have always been drawn from among the ranks of Hong Kong's most influential people. The only difference these days is that they tend to be Chinese rather than British or Australian origin.

Allegations of race-fixing and

illegal gambling are commonplace in the colony but the Jockey Club has consistently denied that there is any serious problem. These denials will be hard to sustain in the face of this crackdown. The club says that it is fully co-operating with the ICAC investigation.

Last October the club disciplined two jockeys for "stopping their horses running on their merits" and said that its investigation into the affair was continuing.

The arrests are believed to have included some of the leading names in Hong Kong horse racing. The colony's law prevents disclosure of names of those arrested on allegations of corruption until they are charged.

The superb racing facilities and the extremely generous payments made to racing professionals has made the colony a favoured destination for visits by most of the world's leading jockeys and trainers.

Leading British-based jockeys, such as Pat Eddery, Walter Swinburn and Frankie Dettori have made regular appearances in the colony, alongside the Irish rider Michael Kinane, Eric Saint-Martin and Eric Leger from France and the South African Basil Marcus and Pierre Strudom. Foreign jockeys and trainers are among those questioned by the ICAC, although it is understood that one or more are among those arrested.

The last major racing scandal

was in 1986 when the authorities